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November, 1978

Vol. 52, No. 1

*new novelets*

WHILE THE NORTH WIND BLOWS by CHRISTOPHER ANVIL .....	6
DOGGY IN THE WINDOW by A. BERTRAM CHANDLER .....	30
EXIGENCY & MARTIN HEIDEGGER by JAMES SALLIS .....	50

*new short stories*

DUEL by CHARLES V. DE VET .....	20
GREEN THUMB by MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY .....	71
A HIGH NEGATIVE CORRELATION by VOL HALDEMAN .....	73
THE MAN WHO WASN'T THERE by WILLIAM F. TEMPLE .....	76
WHAT ARE FRIEND FOR? by EILEEN GUNN .....	82
WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO WHEN YOU SEE YOUR LADY STROLLING ON THE DECK OF THE STARSHIP by GRANT CARRINGTON .....	88
THE SOLUTION by STEVE MILLER .....	97
CRUTCH by ROBERT F. YOUNG .....	102
PONCE by GLEN COOK .....	116
LAST ROCKET FROM NEWARK by JACK C. HALDEMAN, Jr. ....	126

*new features*

EDITORIAL by TED WHITE .....	4
OR SO YOU SAY .....	109

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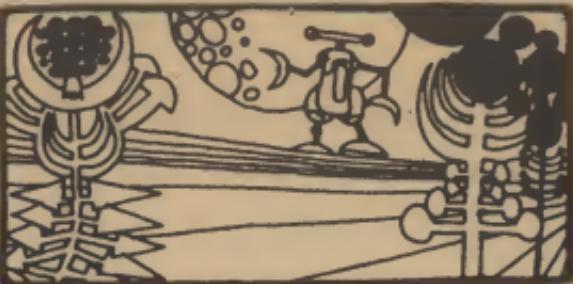
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TED  
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## EDITORIAL



**SCI-FI AND THE DEATH OF SCIENCE FICTION:** If you live in a large metropolitan area, as I do, and you watch much late-night television you've probably seen the commercials for *Starlog*, the sci-fi fan magazine. (I use the phrase "fan magazine" here in the same sense it's been used for years to describe Hollywood fan magazines, not in the sense of "fanzines," magazines put out by sf fans.) They are long commercials, running up to two minutes, and use Robbie The Robot (first manufactured for the fifties *Forbidden Planet*) as the announcer. A few famous names—Heinlein, Clarke, et al—are dropped here and there and there's a line which invariably grates on my ears: "And, oh, those cra-a-a-z-y conventions!"

This isn't the first time something smacking of science fiction has been sold on tv—in the early fifties Hugo Gernsback bought tv time to publicize his brief-lived *Science-Fiction Plus*, and I think *Analog* has also experimented with television promotion, usually in conjunction with a sf series.

But *Starlog* is being sold the same way that all those records advertised on tv are: the actual commercial refers prospective purchasers to a box number rented by the television station, and the commercial is paid for by a percentage of the responses it draws.

This was inevitable, and I only regret that it wasn't us who did it

first—not that we have the resources to produce a tv commercial, sadly—I have no beef with *Starlog* there.

What does concern me is that *Starlog* and its visibility on television are symptomatic of the commercial success of "sci-fi."

I don't want to digress here about the ugliness of the phrase, "sci-fi", nor the disgust which most people in science fiction feel when they hear that phrase. Rather, as I've said here recently, "sci-fi" epitomizes to me the dichotomy between science fiction as it really is and the popular image of science fiction as held by the masses and the mass media.

The image is winning over the substance.

Some years ago Gardner Dozois predicted (in a convention speech which we published in the November, 1973 issue of our companion magazine, *FANTASTIC*, as "Mainstream SF & SF") that science fiction would split into two streams, a "mainstream" sf which achieved best-seller status, and a "genre" sf which continued to develop the traditions of the past fifty-odd years. "Genre" sf, he said, would remain a somewhat esoteric field with a more limited appeal; "mainstream" sf, on the other hand, would enjoy culture-wide popularity. He was absolutely right.

The only thing Gardner overlooked was that the "mainstream" branch might even leave behind the printed word. He overlooked, in other words,

(cont. on page 114)

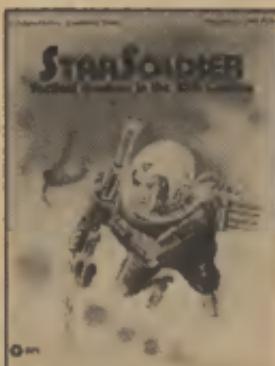
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# WHILE THE NORTH WIND BLOWS

## CHRISTOPHER ANVIL

*Between the Flits and the Slags a guy could be kept hopping!*

DAVE HUNSACKER, the early-morning air cold on his face, looked down from above on the dark tops of the big trees he was used to seeing from below. Not since the colonization ship had first brought the colonists to the planet had Dave enjoyed this particular view, and in fact, he was not enjoying it very much right now. Leaning out the open viewport as the space yacht slowly descended, he intently scanned the sea of shadowy treetops, where stray wisps of fog trailed up, and a little of the winter's snow still lay on the branches. Suddenly, near the top of a towering fern tree, a bright yellow glow appeared.

Dave cleared his throat.

"The pests are awake. There's the first blast."

He noted the location of the tree, near a large oblong clearing where the snow still lay in heaps.

In the forest just to the east of the clearing, a dozen more bright dots sprang to life:

He said urgently, "There's more of them! Better lift!"

The space yacht slowed its descent, paused, hovered—

Down below, the first glow blossomed into a climbing foot-thick pillar of fire that lit the surrounding

treetops like the rising sun, and was reflected brightly on the snow of the nearby clearing.

The yacht continued to hover.

Dave pulled himself inside, and glanced around.

At the yacht's controls, Jim Fielding, the sweat running down his face, was using both hands to heave upward on the chrome-plated control stick.

"Something's wrong," said Fielding. "I tried for maximum lift and got nothing."

"Let go, and try it again. If we don't get out of here fast, we're going to get cooked in flaming pitch."

Fielding let go of the control stick, and lifted gently.

Dave looked back out the viewport.

Now the other dots of light had lengthened into climbing lines of flame.

A mechanical voice spoke in soothing tones from a grille over the control board.

"This is your Stand-By Pilot speaking."

Dave, at the viewport, noted the sharply defined edges of the climbing streams of fire. Within the bright glow, shadows seemed to whirl and spin, appear and vanish. Like curving fingers, the dazzling streams were be-

Illustrated by STEVE FABIAN



WHILE THE NORTH WIND BLOWS

ginning to tilt toward the hovering yacht.

He slammed shut the viewport.

The mechanical voice was saying, ". . . detect no near physical obstacle below, and no approach of other spacecraft which would justify extreme acceleration. Your Helth-Gard System is countermanding, for your protection and the comfort of your guests, an overly extreme control-signal. Always be sure that you use your Convenience Control with care, and that small children do not obtain access to . . ."

With a feeling of unreality, Dave watched the bright curving fingertips dip toward him. Down below, fresh dots of light were blossoming into climbing streams of fire. He kept his voice level.

"Be gentle, and *try to lift again!*"

Fielding very cautiously lifted up on the shiny chrome stick.

The yacht began to climb.

Dave tensely watched the arcs of flame converge.

Fielding said, "Will we make it?"

"Not at this rate!"

Fielding with desperate caution lifted the stick further.

The yacht was rising with increasing speed, but the streams of flame were coming faster.

Dave stood frozen, willing the yacht to climb faster. Already he seemed to feel the heat of the flame on his face.

The yacht abruptly stopped rising, and again hovered.

"This is your Stand-By Pilot speaking. Advanced instruments detect no physical obstacle below, and no approach of other spacecraft which—"

A bell went off with a clang that vibrated the whole ship. The deck leaped underfoot like an express elevator hit from below by a giant's

sledgehammer. There was a roar and a scream of tortured metal, a sense of unbearable pressure, and the world went black.

**H**E CAME TO to the sound of occasional spaced hammer-like blows, and a new and different mechanical voice:

". . . your Emergency Safewatch Monitor Systems. We regret the momentary inconvenience of Interlock Maxiboost Acceleration, which was necessary to prevent severe equipment and personnel damage due to . . ." There was a pause, then the voice concluded ". . . excessive heat."

Dave Hunsacker, flat on the deck, opened his eyes to see Jim Fielding pull himself to a sitting position, then stagger to his feet to look at the shining chromium-plated stick, and then at the grille over the control panel.

Dave became aware of a severe headache, and of a need for profanity that no profanity he could think of would fill. The day before, the loud and boisterous people who had brought this yacht to the planet had set down near a place locally known as "Packbear Flats," and had rudely interrupted the end of the bears' winter sleep. When the bears finished relieving their irritation, Hunsacker and his settlement had inherited the yacht, and also, due to the earlier landing of a different yacht, they found themselves the delighted hosts for a number of attractive young women. The girls had been led to land because of the look of the spring sun on the winter snow, and the men in the other yacht had been attracted by the presence there of the girls' yacht. It seemed reasonable to Dave and his friends that two yachts, sitting upright in the open sunlight, and pulse-reflection-coated around their spire-like snouts, might attract any

number of unwanted guests. The obvious thing to do was to get the yachts out of sight. And the obvious place to put them was under the trees near the clearing, where Dave and Jim Fielding had just tried to go.

Fielding let his breath out with a hiss.

"Well, the slags are sure through hibernating, just like the rest of the pests. But we've still got to get these things out of sight, somehow. Now what do we do?"

Dave got carefully to his feet.

"The obvious place is still the same."

"Under the big steelwood trees, just back from the edge of the clearing?"

"Right. The trees are big, well-spaced, clear of limbs for most of their height, and then the branches interlace thickly overhead. Also, they're close to the settlement. The spot is ideal."

"How do we get past the slags?"

Dave opened the viewport and peered down, where a single intensely bright line was still climbing up from the dark forest.

Fielding looked out beside him, watching as the bright line seemed to waver, and suddenly vanished. Fielding said exasperatedly, "Can you tell me how a thing like a giant caterpillar can generate, much less *aim*, a stream of flame?"

Dave shook his head. He said drily, "However, they *can*."

Fielding nodded. "That time Abe and I decided there were getting to be too many of the things, and we tried to cut down a fern tree to get one of them—you remember that?"

Hunsacker grinned. "I remember it."

"That son-of-a-gun took a shot at me from his hole eighty feet up, and

the flaming pitch was right behind me for a hundred yards. It was like trying to sneak off with their prey. The thing *could* have cooked me alive anytime, but it just didn't choose to do it. They only grill *flying* creatures."

"Unfortunately," said Dave, "as far as the slags are concerned, that now includes *us*. I wonder if there's any way we could come in from out of their range, near ground level, so they'd class us as *ground* animals."

Fielding thought a moment, then shook his head.

"The trees are too thick. It would take us forever to chop a way through."

From the grille over the control panel came a polite mechanical voice:

"This is your RoBoButler Service. A Type-3 light gravitor vessel of the "skimmer" class is again circling the ship, apparently endeavoring to gain your attention."

Dave glanced out the viewport, but saw nothing.

From somewhere came a hammering noise, as if someone reached out and pounded hard on the hull.

Fielding snapped on the communicator.

"Who's there?"

There was no reply, and he tried again, using the outside loudspeaker.

Dave glanced back out the viewport.

Around from his left, twelve-foot leathery wings stiffly outspread, kite-like tail slightly arched, and the big-beaked head on its long neck tilted to regard the yacht, came another of the planet's prime pests. As he watched, it moved its wings briefly with a *flick-flick-flick* sound, spun its tail and head, and reversed its course. It disappeared climbing to the left, and Hunsacker sucked in his breath and slammed shut the viewport.

"Now what?" said Fielding.

"We've had slags. Now we've got flits."

The creature suddenly reappeared in the viewport, circling back from the right. Its beak flashed out on its long neck, and banged against the viewport. Then for an instant its head was pressed against the transparent surface, the big eye peering in intently. Then it was gone.

The two men stood frozen, and it went through Dave's mind that one twist of that curved beak could rip out a man's throat, or strip his flesh from the thigh to the knee. Of course, the flits, for some reason, prepared to first soften up their prey by dropping it a hundred feet or so onto bare rock.

Hunsacker let his breath out slowly. Fielding cleared his throat.

"They don't come much closer than that, old buddy. If the port had been open, that thing could have run its extension-tongs neck in here and snaked one or the other of us right out for the long dive."

From the direction of the control panel there came again the polite mechanical voice:

"This is your RoBoButler Service. We repeat that a Type-3 light gravitor-vessel of the skimmer class is circling the ship, attempting to gain your attention."

"It's gained it," said Fielding, looking over the control panel. "I'd like to know the I.Q. of the computer that runs this luxury pot."

"Somewhere in the high teens or low twenties," said Dave, looking around and fixing in his mind, in case a quick retreat should be in order, the location of the shaft down to the next level. "It seems to me we ought to have some kind of a reply for that bird, before it tries again, knocks the port off its hinges, and climbs in."

"I'm looking for something sharp on this panel . . . Here, this looks promising." Fielding threw a switch, and a recorded voice boomed outside:

"Your attention, please. This vessel is fully protected by appropriate devices of the Advanced Synodic Products Corporation. It will retaliate automatically against any aggressive or hostile action."

The two men glanced at each other. "That's more like it."

A shadow drifted across the viewport. From somewhere overhead, on the yacht's nose, came a faint rumble.

Hunsacker warily glanced out the viewport, to see the flying creature twist sharply to one side.

There was a blast of pink radiance, that narrowly missed it.

The flit shot down around the opposite side of the yacht, there was a violent scratching scrabbling noise, then a loud booming note, a sizzling sound, and a shriek.

Fielding, adjusting the viewscreen, said, "This yacht seems to have some kind of energy cannon mounted on it. —There goes the flit, diving straight down!"

Dave glanced at the screen, to see a burst of bright lines rise up from the forest to form a net around the creature, which abruptly spread its huge wings, twisted in the fiery lines and slammed wildly into the treetops.

The two men watched the screen thoughtfully.

Dave said, "What was that scratching sound after the energy cannon took a crack at the flit the first time?"

Fielding shook his head. "There must be some way to get a better look than I got. It seemed to me the flit tried to run up the side of the yacht to get at the cannon."

Hunsacker thought it over. "And what was the booming noise?"

"I don't know. Everything happened fast just then. I didn't see anything that ought to have made that noise." He glanced at the viewscreen, and worked its control switches. "The side of the ship seems to be okay."

Dave looked out the closed viewport.

"Rotate the ship, why don't you, and let's take a look around."

Fielding turned the chrome-plated control-stick, and the ship slowly rotated.

Peering out through the viewport, Dave Hunsacker saw a pair of dots approaching from the direction of the lightening sky to the east, and several more to the northeast. In the other directions, the sky was still too dark to make out anything in the distance.

"What do you see?" he asked.

"Flits," said Fielding. "Of course, we'd expect to see them. They're migrating north with the spring. And we're right on the main route."

"These don't look like they're migrating north right now. They're headed towards us."

Fielding nodded. "I see it, but I don't understand it. Well. . . . Now what do we do?"

Dave tried to get a mental grip on the situation, but couldn't do it.

Fielding suggested, "Set down again?"

"We might as well, I suppose."

Fielding nodded moodily.

"Flits and slags; slags and flits. . . . That's the story of this planet. If it isn't one miserable thing, it's another."

Dave nodded, and stared out the viewport. "They *are* headed this way, and coming fast."

"I'll set down." Fielding swung the ship back over the bluff, there was a brief dazzling flash from below, and he lowered the ship to a gentle land-

ing beside the other yacht, in the clearing known as Packbear Flats. The two men dropped down the grav shaft, lowered the ramp, and got out.

There was a small crowd at the base of the second yacht, but Dave stopped beside a tall girl standing a little back from the crowd. He said nothing, looking at the working colonists and the watching girls, then glanced uneasily at the sky.

She followed his gaze. "Trouble?"

He noted that the flits he could still see from here were considerably closer, and still apparently headed for the same spot as before.

He nodded. "Trouble, with wings."

"The kind of bird that stalked us yesterday? —That was coming north in a big flock?"

"The same. Apparently the flock has paused and spread out to hunt. They do that sometimes, when there's bad weather further north."

"I can't see them."

"Look for a dot that seems not quite stationery, or a kind of dust particle with a slow waving motion. With practise, unless there's one inside a cloud, or coming at you with the sun behind it—you can spot them a long way off. —Especially after they drop down after you once or twice."

She smiled wryly.

"Did all these things turn out just for us? The bears, these flying things, and these things you mentioned that live in big trees, and knock down the flying things?"

"It's just that the weather's changing. The slags—the things in the trees—hibernate like the bears. The flits winter in the south. A week or two ago, all these things were out of sight." He glanced at the other space yacht. "Is it flyable?"

"The fuel line and some of the wiring had been ripped loose. That's

nearly fixed. But the plates in the base section have been so badly battered that it would leak air no matter what we might do. It's flyable, I think, as long as it doesn't leave the planet. But we should get it out of sight. You'd be surprised how visible one of these yachts is from high up."

He nodded, but for a moment didn't say anything. Her presence affected him like cool water after a long hot day. Then he smiled, checked the sky again, and described what had happened. As he finished, he was conscious of someone else, and turned to see several men, and a strongly built woman of about medium height, a wrench in one hand, listening intently to him. This was Phyllis Laffert, about whom the colony's men, their egos rubbed raw by her abrasive tongue, often said, "If she was a man, you'd have to break her neck. Since she's a woman—well, what can you do?"

She said now, "Well, that's nice. The slags *are* awake, then?"

"Wide awake," said Dave. "There's one, just back from the edge of the clearing, that erupts like a volcano."

She narrowed her eyes.

"You'd say there are more around the clearing than last year?"

Dave nodded. "A lot more. Before we got away from there, there were dozens of them, and from where I was, only part of the forest was visible. On top of that, it's just turned warm, and the youngest ones will still be in torpor, so we didn't run into all of them."

"They have to be cut down," she said to the men, "or thinned out. It's getting so that if a dead leaf blows over that field, it's like an aerial barrage."

The men standing around looked profoundly uncomfortable, and said

nothing.

She said, "We can't keep planting that field if those slags aren't thinned out somehow."

One of the men said hesitantly, "Maybe a little later in the year—"

She looked at him angrily.

"A little later, nothing. This should have been taken care of in the winter, while they were asleep. They have no *natural* enemies. It's up to *us* to control their numbers."

"Yes, but Phyl— To climb one of those trees at twenty below zero with your hands numb, and not a branch from the ground up for eighty feet—"

"They should be cut down."

"What? In a howling gale, trees that size, with the wood froze like rock?"

There was a brief twanging sound before she could reply and they all looked around, to see the other space yacht slowly and majestically rise up until it was at the height of the bluff, then pause, and climb slowly higher. It was perhaps one hundred and fifty feet above the height of the top of the bluff when a brilliant line of fire reached up toward the yacht from somewhere back in the forest.

Phyllis Laffert, in a tone of disgust, said, "Now they're *there*, too. —Scatter!"

Dave saw one of the disk-shaped skimmers sitting not far off. Since everyone else at once headed for the base of the bluff, and the caves there, he caught the girl's hand, and led her quickly to the skimmer.

From overhead came a loud clang-ing, but he didn't spare the time to glance up. He shot the skimmer off flat and fast, away from the bluff. When he glanced back, no one was in sight, the yacht was a mere speck high in the sky, and steam was rising from patches of snow on the flat land

near the other yacht.

She glanced around, looked at him, and smiled suddenly, but said nothing.

He hovered briefly above some low trees below the bluff, his mind a maze of calculations.

He studied the sky, and the flits. They were still high up, and they were still coming. From his present angle of vision he could see no less than six of them.

She followed his gaze. "Now I see them. What are they doing?"

"That's what I want to find out."

He swung the skimmer up, and the morning sun, just lighting the treetops, seemed to lift over the horizon as he rose. Still below the top of the bluff, he passed above the yacht left standing below, and as the sun struck its upright bow, a piercing green flash half-blinded him.

He said, "That's the pulse-relection coating?"

She nodded. "It stores up light-energy—however feeble the light may be—and releases it almost straight up when the stored energy reaches a certain level. You can see the flash a long distance up. Since it emits only the wave-length coded for that particular yacht, to a certain extent you can identify the yacht by eye—by the color of the flash."

"You can see it *very* well?"

"Yes. It's like a beacon."

"Can you scrape this coating off?"

"You have to somehow dismount the cannon first. The coating is a safety feature, and as I remember the service manual, the cannon is hooked up to protect the coating from damage by life-forms attracted by the radiation pulses."

He nodded.

"And you say there were *fifteen* yachts in the party you started out

with?"

She nodded. "We broke up after the trouble on one of the colony planets. That was when it dawned on us that some of the others were using a kind of drug, and raiding the colonists."

"All we need is another crew like that last one. —Hang on!"

She took a strong grip on the hand-holds.

He glanced around, noted the yacht overhead had moved off to the side, and shot up above the edge of the bluff. As the forest atop the bluff dropped below, he slowed, and watched.

A lance of flame about an inch thick started climbing from below. It arched up like a fusion beam warping through a dense gravitic field, and it was headed so nearly straight for them that Dave could only judge its height by the foreshortened glowing curve he could make out. He started climbing again.

She crouched low, peering over the edge.

There was a sort of wavering of the bright curve, and then it broke, and as far as could be seen, there was nothing.

They were now high up, and the wind was beginning to buffet the skimmer. Dave glanced around, but not down. He hadn't been in the open at such a height in years, and an attack of vertigo was all he needed.

She said, "That was just *one* of them?"

He nodded. "Usually there's a bunch of them, so anything passing overhead runs the risk of getting grilled in the pattern put up by the colony. The only way to avoid being attacked is to get well below tree level; but you can still get hit when anything else gets attacked. If you hap-

pen to be down there when the hot pitch comes down, that's not much fun."

The skimmer's communicator buzzed and crackled. Jim Fielding's voice said, "Nice fireworks. You okay?"

"Yeah. This thing has a good rate of climb."

"Don't shake hands with yourself too soon. Another batch of flits are out."

Dave looked around. "That makes sense. Where did you see them?"

"To the west. They're headed north, and there must be fifty or sixty at least in the part of the main body. How high are you now?"

"High enough so I'm afraid to look over the edge. Why?"

"Then you're about their height. Watch out the flankers don't get diving room above you."

Dave looked around, and saw nothing in the cloudy gloom to the west.

"This wasn't a flock of young ones, was it?"

"The smallest one I saw looked about twenty feet across the wingtips."

"How were they flying?"

"Beat. But hungry. They weren't making a sound, apart from a slow creak of their wings. We got a good look. This yacht is nice for sightseeing."

"Did they attack?"

"They ignored us. But they may not ignore you."

Dave looked to the west and again saw nothing.

"Thanks," he said.

"Glad to bring the happy tidings," said Fielding.

Dave was now gradually starting to freeze. He felt for the communicator's shut-off, and said, "See you, Jim, I hope."

"Yeah. Good luck, Dave."

He found some kind of a switch, the communicator clicked, and he looked around. To the east, he spotted the flits he had seen before.

The huge creatures were close now, coming together as if drawn from half of a circle miles across. As he watched, one-by-one they came together, and swung around each other, a total of nine huge predators with their outstretched heads turning first this way, then that.

Dave cautiously looked over the edge of the skimmer. Far below, almost directly beneath the circling flits, was the oblong clearing.

They seemed to be at about the same height, and directly over the same part of the forest, where the yacht had been attacked by the first flit.

He frowned. What had brought all these predators together? Particularly at just the spot where one of their number had attacked the ship—which had since moved on?

"Fish around in that compartment," he said, "and see if you can find a blanket, robe, or something."

She drew out a large plaid blanket, and passed it to him. As he took it, it grew warm to the touch.

From somewhere came a *flick-flick-flick* sound, and he glanced up.

A huge creature, big beak outstretched, hurried past some sixty feet overhead, dropped down, and joined the other circling monsters.

Dave gave brief silent thanks that they were still alive, and glanced at the girl. Her pale expression as she searched the sky reaffirmed his estimate of her sense. But the fact remained that they had both missed that one, and it could have had them if it hadn't been on more urgent business.

There were now ten gigantic flits

circling slowly, turning their heads alertly in all directions.

Dave looked around.

She said, "There."

From the vague gray background to the west emerged another one.

Eleven flits circled patiently, looking earnestly all around.

She pointed toward the northwest.

"Here's another."

As Dave glanced around, he faintly heard something coming from a different direction. Then, it was clearer:

*Flick-flick-flick.*

He looked down.

Below the level of the skimmer, neck outstretched, head tilted, came another one—this time from the southwest.

There were now thirteen of the gigantic creatures circling, necks outstretched, tilting their heads this way and that.

He glanced around, and saw, due west, an unusually big one flapping its way in against the wind.

Now fourteen of the monsters circled, grimly patient.

Dave's mind was a boiling turmoil as he tried to join disconnected bits and pieces of information to make some sense of what was happening. One after another the thoughts flashed into his mind, to be examined like the separate pieces of a puzzle:

The flits were coming north.

They were hungry.

They were at or close to the spot where one had attacked the yacht.

The yacht, at that time, had just barely escaped the slags.

The slags lived in resinous trees, could digest the cellulose of the trees, but seemed to also need a small amount of protein. The slags got protein by knocking down flying creatures that passed overhead, the huge flits making particularly desired

targets.

Except for the slags, the flits had no known natural enemies.

The slags themselves had no known natural enemies at all.

The flits, except when migrating lived separated, each pair apparently having their own territory, and adjusting the borders according to their numbers.

The slags lived in colonies, which increased fast.

The slags apparently made their raw material from the resin of the trees in which they lived, but how they made it in such quantities, projected it to such heights—and particularly how they lit it in the first place—were mysteries none of the colonists had yet solved. About all that was definitely known was that the slags were very free with their fiery blast in wet weather, and cautiously sparing in times of drought.

Dave thought it over in bafflement, and two more pieces of information occurred to him:

The slags were far more numerous now than when the colonists had first arrived.

The flits, too, were clearly more numerous.

—And then, as he watched the circling flits, the scattered pieces of information suddenly began to fit together. He glanced around, aware that he had fallen into a dangerous reverie, and then he saw that the girl was alertly keeping watch, one hand on the skimmer's gun.

Dave glanced at the flits in momentary puzzlement. The day before, he'd been certain that one of them was stalking the skimmer—getting in position for an attack. Today, they acted almost as if the skimmer were a fellow creature.

Frowning, he said, "Chloe?"

She smiled.

He said, "I want to try something. Keep an eye on these flits, and let me know if any of them makes any motion as it to attack us. I'm going to be watching the forest."

She nodded, and glanced carefully all around.

He swung the skimmer past the huge monotonously circling creatures, and one or two of the monsters glanced at him with what appeared to be an approving friendly gaze. For a moment, he had a weird sense of circling with his fellows, high in the sky, wings spread, the world stretched out below. He told himself that he needed sleep, recovered the thread of his thoughts, and started to drop the skimmer down.

After a moment, she caught her breath, started to speak, then remained tensely silent. Then she glanced at him.

"They don't seem to be going to attack us—but *they're following us down.*"

He looked up, to see that several of the huge creatures had left the circle, and were spiraling down, following the skimmer.

"Hang on," he said. "Apparently there has never been anything on this planet roughly their size and shape that could fly, except themselves—so they *seem* to accept us as being one of them. In case they change their minds, though, we want to be ready to get out of here in a hurry."

She watched them alertly. "I hope they don't change their minds."

"The slags, of course, will also take us for flits."

Dave, looking down at the forest a little later, thought that they were almost as low now as the yacht had been when the slags had gone to work on it. But, so far, there was no re-

sponse from below, and he continued to drop down.

Then, near the edge of the clearing, a yellow glow burst into life, and another, and another. Dozens of glowing lines began to climb up out of the still dark forest into the sunlight.

From above came a sudden booming, a noise such as Dave and Jim Fielding had heard earlier, but far louder, and growing louder yet. The separate notes seemed to reinforce, resonate, gather power—

"Hang on!" said Dave. He checked to see that she had a firm grip, then shot the skimmer fast to the side. The forest and the rising streams of fire blurred, the booming died away, he peered ahead, and up, and sent the skimmer into a steep climb.

The forest dropped away below, until they were looking down on scattered clouds, sunlit treetops, and two curving arcs of gray specks that converged toward the gray-and-white rectangle of snow-filled clearing atop the bluff. Even here, in the whistle of an icy wind, he could hear a faint booming note, and see a cross-hatching of bright lines against the darker background of the forest.

She looked all around. "Is it safe here?"

He glanced around dubiously. "If your friends on the other yachts don't show up. If the skimmer doesn't quit on us."

"What happened back there? Did you figure out what they were doing?"

"Something Jim Fielding said occurred to me. He said it looked as if the flit that attacked us had tried to *run up the side of the ship to get at the energy cannon.* Now, the energy cannon used heat-energy as a weapon. To one of these flying monsters, what would that mean that

an energy cannon is?"

"A slag?"

"Exactly. And the yacht—a vertical cylinder—what can that be but a very tall tree? Now, if the flit tries to run up the side of the ship, which it thinks is a tree, to get the energy-cannon, which it *thinks* is a slag, what will it do with a real slag?"

She looked over the edge, where the gray specks were vanishing, and the bright lines were no longer visible.

"Then," she said, "that booming was a call, and the flits that hear it go to the spot where they heard the call given. But why should they prey on the slags now and not ordinarily?"

"Ordinarily, they're spread out in pairs. What can one or two of them do against a whole colony of slags? But now they're migrating, and they're in large numbers. What they live on when they're migrating, I don't know, but I imagine they welcome a nice juicy slag when they can get it—and there's a big colony of them down there. The possibility should have dawned on us before. *Something* must keep down the numbers of the slags, or they'd overrun the planet."

He glanced around, looked down, and saw a cloud of stream drifting from the forest near the clearing.

He snapped on the communicator.

"Jim?"

"Dave?" answered Jim Fielding's voice. "You still with us?"

"So far. Why?"

"A hurricane of flits went by, headed in your direction. I thought maybe they were taking turns dropping you on the rocks."

"No, we're friends with them. We showed them where your pals the slags hang out, and the flits went down for a visit."

There was a silence and a murmur of voices, then Fielding said, "Abe's in touch with us from the other skimmer, near the cabins. He says there was a noise like the sky had turned into a washtub, and someone was pounding on it, and then there was a terrific uproar, with screams, breaking branches, streaks of fire in all directions, sizzling snow, shrieks, bellows, and clutching noises. Do you mean to tell me the *flits went after the slags?*"

Dave glanced all around, just in case, then said, "It seems reasonable to me. But I don't *know* what happened. We got out of there. You can go take a good close look if you want to."

"If there weren't quite so many holes in this tub, we would. Where are you now?"

"Roughly over the clearing. It seems to me that we're about three miles up. You know, it *might* be possible to get those yachts into the forest now without getting cooked. The slags have something else to think about."

"That's a thought. Maybe we *could*." There was a tense pause. "We won't get another chance like this. Okay, we're going to try it."

"Good luck."

"Thanks. Same to you, Dave . . . I hope."

"See you, Jim." He snapped off the communicator, and glanced at the girl, who, the blanket tight around her shoulders, and her hands gripping the edge of the skimmer, was looking over the rim to see beneath the skimmer. She turned, and glanced around overhead.

Dave watched approvingly, not only struck by her looks, but by her alertness. He glanced quickly around, then started down.

"You seem," he said, "to catch onto the spirit of this place unusually fast."

She nodded. "In some ways, it's just like home. Only there should be more snow, and a lot of salt water."

"A colony planet?"

She said ironically, "Just a planet to get rich quick on, and get off of in three years."

He grinned. "I suppose a person could learn a lot in those three years."

She nodded. "Such as 'Keep looking ahead, or you may go through where it's thin, and come up where it's thick.' That is, under the ice."

He considered it, and glanced briefly around. "No wonder this place seems almost like home to you. The spirit's the same. It's just the details that are different. But we have a poet here, to immortalize the details. Can you equal this:

"Do your dreaming while at home in bed.

Our stranglebush makes walking sleepers dead."

"H'm," she said, "'stranglebush.'" She grinned and glanced around. "Yes, I think we had something almost as nice:

"Stay on-trail.

That's the law.

Snowtrapper has

A one meter jaw."

They looked at each other, and suddenly they were both laughing.

He said, "There was something I wanted to ask you, but I've been hesitating. For one thing, we haven't known each other very long. For another thing, there's something about this place which—while at least it's not civilization—still, it falls short of perfection. Moreover—"

"Do you," she said, smiling, "always make these long speeches before you say something?"

"I was afraid you might not appreciate what it's actually *like* here."

She glanced around alertly. "That's true, but I *do* know what civilization is like. We found that out after Daddy found the ore-body, and all of a sudden we had money." She said this as she might have said, "Then I slipped in a hole and got a broken leg."

Dave glanced around, and studied a large dark cloud about half-a-mile away. He glanced down, where the treetops swayed, and steam and wet smoke boiled up.

"This," he said looking back at her, "encourages me to offer you a way to escape from all that."

"Some day, if you ever get around to actually making the offer, maybe I'll tell you what happened. You want to know in case you ever should land in the same spot."

"The way things are here, the danger of *that* is slight. However, there are other things, and I'm trying to remember . . . yes, I think I've got it, now. You should know at least this much before I say anything else. Just keep an eye on that big dark cloud while I recite this.

She cast a quick look around, and watched the cloud. He thought a moment, then slowly recited:

"Welcome, Friend, to our planet of ease.

In winter here, you will sneeze and freeze;

But don't complain without good reason;

Save your curse for a still worse season.

When sweet summer's sun the snows doth warm,

The pests pour forth in a hideous swarm:

Bears and badgers, slags and flits,  
Bugs to drive you out of your wits;  
Stung you'll be, and frequently bit.

Just name it, Friend; we've got it."

She laughed, and he said, "That doesn't cover it, but you should have some idea."

She glanced at him shyly, then spoke in a soft voice. "I think I follow your reasoning; but you're so cagy about actually *saying* anything that I'm having a little trouble springing the trap." She glanced at the cloud. "However, there's still time, if you hurry. Perhaps it will help if I recite a verse:

"While the icy northwind still doth blow,  
Hasten your travelings o'er the snow.

Brethren, sweet springtime's cozy hush  
Will sink you deep in bottomless mush."

"And," she said, looking around, "this is going to be a warm day."

He took a quick glance around, then, alternately glancing at the approaching cloud and at the space yacht slowly descending toward the clearing, he proposed.

She accepted.

During that instant when neither was watching, there burst from the cloud, wings folded and claws outstretched, a large flit, followed by a second, a third, and a fourth. They shot past the yacht, directly between it and the skimmer, and headed for the forest. Atop the yacht, the energy cannon loomed out of its housing.

Dave shouted, "*Hang on*"

She gripped the holds, he glanced back, and snapped the skimmer sharply to the north.

The blaze of pink radiance shot past, the flits vanished through a hole in the treetops, a slag below was already taking a shot, and as Dave swerved sharply, another flit dropped out of the cloud and went past like a bounder.

He got more height, then went over the edge of the bluff high enough up to avoid the slag nested in the trees somewhere down there, and at once was almost blinded by the glare from the nose of the yacht below. He glanced through the afterimages to observe that she had shut her eyes in time, and as he dropped down toward the yacht, he wondered briefly just what this planet she had come from had actually been like, to breed such alertness and mental control.

Sometime soon, he thought, he'd have to ask her—sometime when the door was triple-barred and braced, his gun loaded and handy, the shutters barred from within, and either a roaring fire in the fireplace, or the chimney-stone lowered solidly into its rests, and the lift-pole jammed in place.

But not just now.

He glanced around intently.

It didn't pay to let the mind wander

—CHRISTOPHER ANVIL

# DUEL

## CHARLES DE VET

*It was to be a duel to the death—between hunter and hunter!*

Illustrated by RICHARD OLSEN

I PICKED UP the first rumor of the Big Cat in Kabul, capitol city of Afghanistan. A bush-bearded pilgrim with square teeth was talking in a loud voice that carried across the lobby of the Alskander Rest hotel to where I sat sipping a tequila stinger. "The biggest damned cat you ever saw," he declaimed to an anemic oldster, "twice as big as a lion or a tiger."

It took a minute for the import of his words to sink in, and when it did I set my drink on the small table beside me and rose with carefully restrained eagerness and walked over to where the two men stood. "I hope I'm not intruding, sir," I addressed the pilgrim. "I believe I heard you mention a big cat?"

"You heard right, my friend. Big as hell—and just as mean." The hirsute traveler was happy to accomodate an addition to his audience. "It's supposed to weigh well over twelve hundred pounds, a great black beast, with a wide white stripe running down the middle of its back. The story is that it killed a full-sized horse and carried it off."

"Did it kill any humans?" I asked.

"I heard it killed a half dozen, the first day it showed up." He paused to savor my obvious fascination, then added regretfully, "I'm afraid that's about all I can tell you though, because that's all I know."

"Did you hear, by any chance, that it was intelligent?" I drew in my breath, afraid to hope.

"I did hear that it was mighty crafty, now that you mention it. The Kurds went after it full force, but it always tricked them and got away. That sounds pretty smart to me."

"You said Kurds?"

"Yes. It turned up in the Kurdistan mountains, in Turkey I believe, though it might have been on that sector of the plateau that juts over into Iraq. The Kurds don't pay too much attention to national boundaries, you know."

Which was all I needed to spur my gaming instincts into action. I excused myself, found a telephone booth, and called the airport. An hour later I was on a plane bound for Malatya, Turkey.

BY THIS TIME of course I had a pretty good idea what the cat was, and where it came from. A couple times before one of them had shown up on Earth, displaying a brief, ferocious proclivity for killing and violence, then disappearing. The assumption that they were from some other planet was obvious, their purpose in coming to Earth more difficult to determine.

I was certain I knew. They must have a highly developed technology,

to have spaceflight, yet that proficiency must have developed quickly, while their primitive, savage instincts still formed a large part of their racial heritage. They came to Earth as we go on hunting expeditions to Africa, to test our skill and courage against the dangerous animals there.

Nothing would give me more pleasure than to contest this particular hunter.

I HAD TO make an overnight stop in Shiraz, Iran, but I reached Malatya about ten the following morning—and there confirmed the rumor of the Big Cat. It was supposed to be holed up near Gavar, a small Kurdish town about ten miles west of Diyarbakir. I hired a car and driver to take me there.

In Gavar, with the help of my driver and a local gasoline purveyor, I found a sleeping room above the town's largest drinking place, the Thirsty Camel. Modern conveniences there were at a minimum, but right now that was the least of my concerns.

The people of Gavar had no reluctance to talk about the Big Cat, it was their main topic of conversation, but they had no intention of going anywhere near it. The creature had killed three more men, as they sought to track it down, and none of Gavar's citizens intended to be added to the list.

I did learn that a tribe of nomad Kurds—the Hamavands—had taken up semi-permanent residence a few years back on a plain about a mile and a half above the village. The Cat was supposed to be lurking somewhere in that vicinity—which made it my next objective.

I chose a Marlinger 77 from my gun pack. The rifle had brought down



elephants, and was as accurate as any I owned. I would need both qualities, I was certain. I wrapped the gun and ammunition in an oilskin pouch and put them inside my bedroll, with a supply of groceries, added my pup tent, and set out for the nomad camp.

In the Hamavand settlement I sought out the tribal chieftain, a blond man with candid blue eyes, named Frank Bruha—the Rock. (The Kurds are all fair skinned. According to legend their ancestors were the progenitors of the Caucasian race. Centuries ago a confederation of tribes had come out of the Kurdistan mountains, and over many generations made their way along the northern shore of the Mediterranean to the Iberian peninsula, and on up the Atlantic coast—leaving behind cities and settlements all along their route. The vanguard had finally settled in Ireland, by which time they were known as Celts.)

"My name is Ed Rauen," I introduced myself to Bruha. I had some hope of getting information and perhaps help from him, but he greeted me with normal Kurdish taciturnity. About all I learned was that a horse had been killed out on its feeding grounds the day before—horses seemed to be the favorite food of the Cat. I went for my rifle.

I FOUND what remained of the horse, and studied the dead animal, observing how one hind quarter had been cut away as neatly as though sheared through with a giant blade—and that there were blood and gouge marks on the ground about the carcass, but no scraps of hide or bone. I remembered then that the savage brutes ate everything, including hide and bone. The strength of jaw and tooth necessary for that feat was almost inconceivable.

At the prospect of the hunt to come a pleasant spurt of adrenalin jettied through my bloodstream.

I surveyed my surroundings carefully. On this territory the battle would be joined, and I wanted to know it thoroughly. It was all flatland, I saw, with a good supply of feeding grass, and a high rock wall in the near distance, where the meadow ended and the mountains began—and my heart gave a great leaping bound.

Across the ragged face of the wall moved a white-streaked black shadow.

I pulled up my rifle and peered through the telescope sight. It was the Cat! Beyond any doubt. Calmly steadily, I took aim—and fired.

A puff of rock fragments appeared just above the animal's shoulder—and mingled with the fragments was a tuft of black hair!

I had scored.

The Cat's head raised, with its mouth open, and an instant later a faint scream tore at my nerve ends. The Cat's head turned in my direction. I could see in the blazing red eyes that it had spotted me—was seeing me as plainly as I saw it through the telescope sight.

The brute power in those malignant eyes seemed to tear through the gray matter of my brain, sending a shock wave of heat washing over my body that brought perspiration bursting from every pore. I suspect that much of the reaction came from my own imagination, yet my hands involuntarily jerked the scope from my eyes, to free them from that baleful glare.

All this action and reaction occurred in a split second, and immediately I brought my weapon up again and snapped off a second shot. I should have gotten the brute that time, but it sprang away, so swiftly that I got the impression it had vanished, rather

than simply moving away.

I drew in a deep breath, and let it out slowly. I may have lost the Cat, or I may have already won the game. At the very least I had wounded it, which was more than I could have hoped this soon.

The most foolhardy action I could take now, I decided quickly, would be to go after the brute. Pursuing a wounded animal is always dangerous, pursuing an intelligent wounded animal would be suicide. I'd wait a day or two, let the beast bleed, then organize a search party and run it down—if it still lived.

I FOUND a quite diverting way to occupy my time during the waiting period. I had caught a few words as I passed unnoticed behind two Kurds that afternoon, and I reasoned out quickly what they planned. A horse raid. Which was logical, the Hamavands were brigands, and the Cat by this time must have depleted their herd.

The next morning I rode into the gathering of men and horses on the meadow with my pack on my back. Bruha gave me a quick glance of surprise, but did not order me away.

Our party was not large—seven men—but enough for the task at hand. We did not wish to alert any Shawn tribesmen who might observe us, for it was their horses we intended to steal.

We rode in a casual, loose formation, hoping to appear as hunters, out for game. This was adventure, and a stimulating feel of bravado pervaded our little band, myself included. Near the close of the day one of the Kurds shot an antelope—which served the double purpose of promoting our hunter disguise, and helping stretch our limited provisions. And then it

was that my pleasant mood suffered an abrupt setback.

During the meal I chanced to glance up—and found myself staring directly into the Cat's malevolent red eyes. Only its head showed, above a ridge less than fifty feet away. It withdrew immediately.

Even as the realization struck that the beast was certainly not dead—that it had followed me here—I yelled and grabbed my rifle and ran the short distance to the rise where the head had disappeared. The Cat was nowhere in sight.

I returned to the bivouac somewhat embarrassed. None of the others had seen the Cat, and my excited dash and empty-handed return aroused considerable amusement. Especially in the one named Shefiq.

He had been a minor irritant since I arrived. He had taken advantage of my lack of status not simply to ignore me, but to subtly taunt me, as when he'd mumble a Kurdish phrase, which the others would understand and I would not—my knowledge of their language was limited—and there would be laughter. I bided my time.

**T**HE SECOND DAY we entered the hills of Mamuret ul Aziz, homeland of the Shawns, and rode another day before we reached our destination: a herd of Shawn horses. We made camp that night with much stealth and silence. And the Cat made its second appearance.

Only for a brief instant, with no time to use the rifle at my side. I was left with but one certainty: the Cat had recognized me as its principal opponent—and we would duel—to the death of one or the other.

Why hadn't it killed me during the night, I asked myself, and my intuition brought a ready answer. The Cat

had its own hunting code—it must win by wit and guile, by the exercise of greater cunning. To kill me in the dark, when I was helpless, would have been a picayune victory.

That code might be the Cat's undoing. I had no such feelings of the niceties of sportsmanship. I would wait for it to make one mistake—any mistake. I slept soundly that night.

WE AROSE AGAIN in the first false light of dawn and ate dried fruit for a quick breakfast and packed our bed-rolls, and afterward lit cigarettes and tried to draw their warmth into our bodies as Bruha gave us last instructions in muted undertones. As often happens in the mountains a fierce windstorm had come up an hour before dawn, and was sweeping in from the plateau now, chilling us deeply but aiding our concealment.

Bruha chose Shefiq and me to care for the Shawns guarding the horses—a sense of humor, I suspected. We moved out into the dim daylight, Shefiq to the right and I to the left, toward a small copse of trees. It had been calculated that the guards would be there, out of the worst of the storm, yet where they could keep their charges under observation. We would approach them from the rear.

We had chosen well. I came up on my horse guard with his back hunched to the wind, and I pushed the blade of my kiard through his neck before he was aware I was there. There was much blood in the man, and it gushed out freely, flooding my hand and running down my forearm.

I did not wipe away the blood—until I reached camp again. There I raised my red hand, displaying the kiard and the bright blood. Ostentatiously then I cleaned the hand and the weapon on the outside wool of my

zouave jacket—where the Kurds would see it every time they glanced my way. It was an overly dramatic performance, but I knew it would impress my hosts.

SHEFIQ appeared then—and he was not alone. Beside him a Shawn maiden rode in the saddle of a captured horse, with her hands tied to the pommel and her feet bound beneath the belly of the horse. Shefiq's scarf was around her mouth.

He must have decided against killing her when he found her guarding the horses, perhaps from reluctance to kill a girl, but my guess was that he had taken her simply because he wanted her, in the high reckless way that was so much a part of his nature. Bruha, I could see, did not approve—but the deed had been done, and there was no time now for remonstrances.

Bruha rode through the horses, making them restless, and when we shouted and spurred our mounts at them they wheeled and galloped after Bruha's lead mare, as Kurd horses do by instinct. By mid-morning we had ridden out the storm, but we still drove the horses hard, until their backs grew moist and steamy and the wildness left them and they trotted docily. We should have stayed well ahead of any pursuers.

Shefiq rode beside the Shawn maiden—Gulchin, we had learned her name was. In the early part of the morning he brought her some dried bread and a lady finger of dried beef, and a skin of du to wash them down. She took them without thanks, muttering. "Bah! La'nat ullah 'alainim!"

Shefiq took the cursing without offense. When she finished her meal he gave her a cigarette, which he lit, and one for himself, and laughed

when she drew the smoke deep into her lungs and blew it into his face. I had to admit he was handsome, with his wild-hawk features and machismo manner, and before the noon hour came Gulchin allowed herself to laugh, and return some of his sallies.

Toward evening he sang her a courting song. He had only a fair voice, but he sang with emotion, and had a facile gift of mimicry. At the end Gulchin smiled at him with misty eyes. It could be seen that she was prepared now to let him have his will with her.

I too had given her attention often during the ride. She was young, perhaps no more than sixteen, but she was tall and fair, already in the full bloom of womanhood, with a strong feminine attraction, and all about her an aura of leashed, untamed vitality. She reminded me, acutely, that I had not had a woman in several weeks.

She was not shy. She accepted Shefiq's increasingly bold remarks with only small reticence, and returned his hungry glances with a direct gaze. Shefiq chewed his tawny mustache, lust in his slightly bulging eyes, as he waited impatiently for the night.

Shefiq was not a true Kurd, more a Mongol, but a mixture of several races, and a vagabond much traveled. The belief was that he was in the employ of the Muscovites to the north. I guessed that he saw me as an agent of the United States, a rival of his employers.

His attitude toward me had grown more cautious. Word of my handling of the horse guard had undoubtedly reached him, and he saw me now as someone not to be insulted with impunity. Often I caught his calculating glance turned my way, as he weighed

and measured me. The antagonism had not left his regard—rather a new quality had been added to it. He would kill me soon—if I did not kill him first.

**T**HE CHILL night winds had begun to sweep down from the hills, dispelling the day's high heat, as we steered our horses into a narrow gully. There was little fodder for them there, for it had been stripped near clean by the small black locusts that covered the floor of the gully, but they could quench their thirst in the stream at the bottom.

When we finished our evening meal Shefiq prepared Gulchin's blankets for her, well back from the others.

And a plan was born, suddenly, full-blown in my mind.

Even before I was certain the others slept I left my bed and made my way around to where the girl lay. I touched her lightly and laughed deep in my throat, the way Shefiq did, but near soundlessly. She pulled her blanket back and I slid in beside her.

She had removed her tunic and shirt, but her body was tense and fearful, and I kissed her and caressed her gently, moving my hands placatingly over her body, until the restraint left her and she pressed tightly against me.

Still I did nothing, merely holding her close and fondling her, and soon she began to croon, and sway softly. I breathed in a warm fragrance that came from the pores of the flesh itself.

Then I loved her, and she retruned my love, fierce as only a Kurdish maiden can be, breaking the skin of my shoulder with her teeth at the finish.

As soundlessly as I had come I left.

Another ten minutes passed, and I heard an indignant exclamation from the girl, and a curse in the tones of Shefiq. There was a brief struggle, and another curse from Shefiq, this time in sharp pain. He continued to curse all the way back to his blankets.

IN THE MORNING Shefiq discovered that he'd lost face with the Kurds. Though there was nothing concrete to confirm it, only the sly sidelong glances, the remarks one to another in an undertone, and the small chuckles.

In Shefiq's eyes as he studied me was an adding up of the events of the night before, and an understanding of what had happened—and he grew half mad with his need to repair his loss. He had an animal cunning, however, and an agile mind, and I watched him go through his dissembling thoughts, and make his decision, and postpone our moment of confrontation.

We both waited for darkness to come again.

The girl too had her indecision. She knew, of course, that it was Shefiq she had repulsed. She had taken her lover convinced that it was he, but when she discovered her error her affections were already bound to her unknown lover. Her studied indifference to Shefiq now. I was certain, was genuine.

She had evidently quickly eliminated the other Kurds from consideration, and turned her inquiring gaze to me. I met her regard with blank eyes. I did not deceive her, but she was a proud woman, and my reserve brought that pride to the fore, and she became cold to me, ignoring me thereafter.

Which was as I had planned. I had

loved her to set a trap for Shefiq—and to be honest, for my own satisfaction—but that had to be the end of it. There was no possibility of a permanent liaison between me and someone with her unsophisticated background. And while I would certainly have enjoyed a longer dalliance, at the present moment I needed to devote all my attention and energies to Shefiq.

That night when the Cat made its appearance and disappearance—as it continued its cat-and-mouse game to unnerve me—it diverted my thoughts from my other antagonist only momentarily.

UNDER THE cover of darkness I made my preparations for what I was certain would come. I had one big advantage over Shefiq—I understood how his mind worked—and I had made my plans accordingly.

Quietly I removed my sheepskin jacket, wrapping it loosely about my left forearm and making a bulky roll a foot thick. This I laid carefully, in exact position, between my upper thighs. I completed the preparations by taking my heavy kiard in my right hand and stretching my arm out at full length, away from my body. And I was as ready as I would ever be.

An hour passed, and another, until the fire burned low, and flickered out. Around me were only the sounds of sleeping Kurds, and the horses in the near distance. I grew slightly cramped holding the same position for so long, but I did not move, only allowing my breath to grow heavy.

And abruptly it came!

A grunt of exertion from just above me, accompanied by a jolt of pain in my left arm as a kiard, driven with ferocious energy, drove through the bundle on my lap. Its point stopped

only when it grated against the bone of my forearm.

Reacting instantly to the first stab of pain I swept the dagger in my extended right hand around in a wicked half arc, and felt it bury itself deep into unresisting flesh. The someone above me groaned, and a body fell across my face and chest, arched in its death agony. Slowly the starch drained from the stricken body and it relaxed.

For a brief moment I savored a vast relief at how well I had estimated Shefiq—for he it must be. He would kill in the Mongol manner, I had decided, in the meanest most debasing way he knew, bringing his kiard slashing up, past the thighs, and emasculating his victim in the same stroke that laid open his bowels. Leaving him to die in agony, and subject to the degrading amusement of any who viewed his remains.

I rose quickly, before the carcass could bleed, holding its slack weight in my arms, and carried it a good twenty yards from my bed. The camp was quiet as I returned to my blankets. So quiet that I knew all had been wakened, and were listening, knowing the struggle was between Shefiq and myself, and raising no voice to interfere. To the Kurds it was a matter strictly outside their concern.

The next morning the camp came awake at the first break of day. I had slept no more than a few hours. We made our preparations to move, much as we had done other mornings—except that this time Shefiq would not be leaving with us. The Kurds regarded his still carcass, and glanced with raised eyebrows at me, but said nothing. They reasoned out quickly what had happened, and it seemed to strike them as humorous. When we

moved on Shefiq's body was left behind for the buzzards and coyotes. He had died without honor.

A FEW HOURS after we returned to the Hamavand settlement I resumed my quest of the Cat, roaming the base of the rocky cliff—that had to be its hiding place. All that afternoon, and most of the following day I hunted, without a glimpse of my antagonist. I was careful not to go near any cover it might use—otherwise, with its great speed, it would be on me before I could raise my rifle. Which caution could have contributed to my failure to find the animal.

The third day my patience grew thin—and I, not the Cat, made the first mistake. I had decided that it must be hiding somewhere near where I had first seen it, and I climbed the cliff cautiously. The face of the rock was not as steep as it appeared from the distance, and rock falls had made it uneven enough to be traversed without difficulty.

My small indiscretion came near costing me my life. I had bent slightly to keep my balance as I took a step, when the Cat burst into view, charging across the slope, directly at me—a great, rushing, slavering engine of destruction.

I had no time to set myself for a shot—only an instant reflection of dismay at the enormity of my stupidity—before the hurtling black beast was on me. Only the grace of a benevolent god saved me then. Just as the Cat reared to strike, a back foot slipped on a pocket of rock chips, and it lost its balance. It still brushed me, heavily, knocking me against a boulder and driving the breath from my lungs, but its sweeping claws missed me.

I had kept my footing and the grip

on my rifle, and I straightened quickly. The Cat was just disappearing around a rock outcrop below.

I stood gulping in air and sorting out the impressions that had registered during the fleeting encounter. Of primary interest were the Cat's motions as it charged. At each bound its body had twisted to the left, then back again as it straightened. It reminded me of the motions of a jaguar I had come on several days after I wounded it. The jaguar's wound had festered, and gangrene set in—I discovered later when I examined it—and the beast had been dying. The conclusion was obvious—the Big Cat was semi-disabled, probably dying.

Which may have been the reason for its ill-planned attack on me. It had heard me coming, and knew it could not get away, and made its try at me out of desperation. Or it had attacked because it knew it would not live much longer, and might not have another chance to even the score. I wondered why it did not simply return to its home world, where its wounds could be treated. Pride? Or some other emotion too alien for me to understand?

Whatever the reason, time was on my side now. From here in I would play it very safe.

**I**HAD ANOTHER MEETING with the Shawn maiden, Gulchin, that evening. The approaching end of the hunt had filled me with an easy contentment, and I celebrated mildly by going into town for a good dinner, and afterward stopped at the bar of the Thirsty Camel for a bottle of beer.

There I saw the girl—mopping the floor. For some reason the sight of her—stooping to this menial work—made me angry. Somehow it seemed

a rebuke to me. I gave her two hundred dollars and told her briskly to buy a horse and return home, or to find a husband, if she insisted on staying here.

An hour later she came to my room above the tavern, dressed in an outlandish green ballroom dress, and carrying an armload of packages. She had spent all her money on clothes.

Evidently she believed—despite my words—that I had given her the money because I wanted her back, and she was overjoyed. There was nothing for me to do then but to break it off completely. I packed my few belongings, and though giving her money had proven a waste, I did what I could and left fifty more dollars on a table and stopped downstairs and paid the room rent for two months. I would not be returning.

THE NEXT MORNING the Cat struck again. Surprisingly, however, its attack on a young horse in the meadow had been a failure. The Kurds found the colt with two ragged tears in one side, and it died a few hours later, but it was obvious that it had escaped the Cat's attack.

And that afternoon a woman was killed—and partly eaten—within a mile of Gavar.

There was much consternation in the village, but by this time the Cat had them thoroughly cowed. They made no attempt to track the beast.

Not even when a boy died the next morning, and another woman in the evening. They sent a two man delegation to offer me a hundred dollars if I'd kill their tormentor, but that was all.

I continued my hunt more avidly now. The signs were all there: the Cat had weakened from its wound—and probable infection. It was no

longer able to kill a large prey, was reduced to hunting humans, and even then only women and children. I had begun to fear that it would die before I had the satisfaction of killing it. I concentrated on how to avoid that eventuality. And that afternoon the solution came.

I HAD HEARD that the girl, Gulchin, had returned to her job of cleaning the Thirsty Camel, and I went there hoping to find her. I had heard also that she had refused the attention of other suitors, which fitted my plans very well.

She was working in the tavern when I arrived, and I talked to her, and after a period of reticence she agreed to have dinner with me. I took her to the one first-class restaurant in town.

We had a bottle of Mateus with our meal, and were both in a mellow mood when we finished. "Gulchin," I broached then, "I have a favor to ask of you." She looked inquiringly at me. "You know that I hunt the Big Cat?" I asked.

She nodded.

"What I'm going to ask may be dangerous," I cautioned. I took out my wallet and withdrew one thousand dollars—probably more money than she'd ever seen—folded the bills into a small packet and slipped them into her unresisting hand. "Those are yours, whether you decide to help me or not." I smiled at her. "With that money you can get the finest young man in Gavar."

She did not return my smile. "What more do you want of me?" she asked.

"You know that the Cat has killed two women?" I did not wait for her to answer. "I think I know how to trap the beast—so I can kill it. Then it

won't be able to kill any more of your people."

Her eyes widened. "You want to use me as bait?" She had a sharp native shrewdness.

"Yes, but—" I hurried on, "There will be danger, of course, but I'm certain I can protect you."

Some expression came into her face that I was unable to interpret. "Remember, you don't have to do it, if you're afraid," I emphasized. "The money is yours either way."

"I will go with you," she said.

It had been almost too easy. Was it possible she might still think I loved her? "I won't be able to stay with you afterward," I did my best to disabuse her of the idea. "After this is over I'll have to return to my own country. You wouldn't be happy there."

"It's all right, Baba Matti," she said. (It was a nickname meaning Red Wolf, which the Kurds had given me after I'd killed the horse guard and Shefiq.) She put one hand on mine, and I had to let it go at that.

I bought another bottle of wine, and we returned to our room above the tavern, and by the time we had drunk half of it we were in high good spirits. We laughed and we sang, and bathed each other in the room's tin tub, and afterward drank the rest of the wine, and made love. We went to sleep with our arms around each other.

The next day I chose the site of my trap very carefully—a tooth-shaped rock about thirty feet high, that had broken off from the cliff and landed on end, leaving a passage between it and the cliff wide enough for a large man (or an agile cat) to pass through.

I returned to Gulchin, and we made our plans, and when the first night shadows began to fall I returned to my tooth-rock. And I was ready for

(cont. on page 49)

# A. BERTRAM CHANDLER

# DOGGY IN THE WINDOW

Kinsolving's Planet was like no other planet—anywhere . . .

Illustrated by TONY GLEESON

DURING ALL my years as a Rim Worlder and as an officer in Rim Runners I'd never made a landing on Kinsolving's Planet; come to that, I'd never come within extreme guided-missile range of that world. Now, as a naturalised Sirian and a captain in the Dog Star Line, I was not only on Kinsolving but stuck there. It shouldn't have happened to a dog.

I sat glumly in *Basset's* control room, mulling things over in my mind. Commodore Grimes sat with me, presumably similarly employed, although his main preoccupation seemed to be keeping his vile pipe alight. There was nothing that either of us could do here, in the ship's nerve centre, but it was a refuge from the others, from the incessant bombardment of questions to which we had no answers.

I looked out through the wide viewports. The time was late afternoon and the peculiar quality of the sunlight was making the yellows and greens of the jungley landscape look positively poisonous. And, I was sure, the scenery did not look the same as it had looked on the occasion of our dawn landing the previous day. Bindle, my Chief Officer, swore that he had not shifted the ship during our absence from her and I did not doubt his word—but there were low hills

where no hills had been before and the ruins that we could see in the distance looked nothing at all like the crumbling, overgrown remains of Enderton.

Grimes said, speaking around his pipe, "It knows that we're here. *It* doesn't mean to let us go . . ."

*It* was the world of Kinsolving itself, a planetary intelligence that, somehow, had survived cycle after cycle, that had retained *Its* identity through death after death, rebirth after rebirth of the universe. Or so Grimes' psionic communications officer, Mayhew, the highly trained and qualified telepath, had told us.

And what was I, no longer a Rim Worlder, doing in the middle of this essentially Rim Worlds mess? I asked myself. It was all right for the commodore and his people to get mixed up in these affairs, but not for *Basset* and her crew. If the Rim Worlds survey ship *Faraway Quest* hadn't been laid up . . . If the Dog Star Line's *Basset* hadn't come out to the Rim on a tramping voyage and then found herself temporarily unemployed . . . If she hadn't been chartered to do the job that, normally, would have been handled by *Faraway Quest*, carrying Grimes and his small expedition to Kinsolving . . . If, if, if . . .

But we had been so chartered.

Then, very shortly after our landing on Kinsolving, investigations had been initiated in and about the weird Temple of the Principle, the only building in Enderston that, somehow, had remained immune to the general decay. Mayhew had fallen into (?) through (?) the . . . altar (?), plunging to . . . somewhere (?), somewhere (?). Clarisse, Mayhew's wife and fellow psionicist, had followed him. We had rescued them, using two deep sea sounding machines—essentially winches with many metres of piano wire on their drums—that were items of overcarried cargo, originally consigned to Atlantia. We had rescued them but, in the process, seemed to have dredged up the remote Past. Or had we dragged ourselves back in Time?

Bassett was, of course, equipped with Carlotti radio. Our transceiver was powerful enough to put us into direct communication, given favourable conditions, with our home office in Canis Major, let alone any of the Rim Worlds. But our signals, although being beamed with extreme accuracy, did not seem to be getting through. Certainly nothing was coming through to us. And we should not be able to keep up our attempts at electronic communication for much longer. What energy remained in our power cells would have to be carefully conserved.

The Carlotti system has, to a great extent, replaced Psionic Communications but on most planets there are still trained telepaths, most of them in the employ of the armed forces of their worlds. Mayhew had remained in touch with his colleagues in the Rim Worlds Navy until the landing on Kinsolving. Now, he had reported to Grimes, it was as though he had suddenly become a deaf mute. But it was



a selective deafness and dumbness. He could still communicate wordlessly with Clarisse. He could still pick up the thoughts of the rest of us—although, in accordance with the Rhine Institute's Code of Ethics, he was not supposed to. And he was still conscious of the alien intelligence that brooded somewhere in the heart of the planet.

Meanwhile we were stranded. We would have lifted, run for home—assuming that home was still there—but we were . . . stuck. There was nothing at all wrong with our hydrogen fusion generator but, according to my engineers, Canvey and Terrigal, no power was getting through to the inertial drive unit or to the firing chambers of the reaction drive, or even to the ship's auxiliary machinery. They had talked learnedly of induction and more abstruse matters—but all that it boiled down to was that we were being drained of every last erg produced by the generator. As I have said, we still had the power cells—but their endurance was limited.

"It doesn't mean to let us go," said Grimes again.

"And what are *Its* reasons?" I asked.

"I've only a human mind," he said, with a wry grin. "I can only guess how a planetary intelligence would think. From what Mayhew has told us it seems to be a machine of some sort, a super-robot. Perhaps it was built, originally, by beings not unlike ourselves. Then it got . . . uppity. I've had experience with uppity robots in the past—but never such an enormous and enormously powerful one. But *It's* not a god."

"Perhaps not, sir," I agreed dubiously. "But it'll do until a real god happens along."

"Mphm," he grunted. "You know, Clarisse did raise *real* gods once, on this very planet, the deities of the ancient Greek pantheon. Or were they real? I'm not so sure now. Could they have been manifestations of *It*, built up from data extracted from our memories? If that was the way of it, then *It* has a sense of humour, and that makes *It* all the more dangerous . . ."

"Dangerous?" I asked.

"Too right. Even we have a weakness for black humour, and sick humour. And practical jokes can be very malicious. Practical jokes perpetrated by a being with godlike powers might be wildly funny to *It*, but fatal to us."

"Pratfalls can be fatal," I agreed.

"You've hit the nail on the thumb, George." He looked at his watch. "Your efficient purser should have the afternoon tea laid on by now. Shall we go down, or ask her to send ours up here?"

"Well go down," I said. "Just to show the flag . . ."

AFTERNOON TEA was on in the officers' wardroom, a compartment large enough to accommodate, with not too much crowding, both ship's personnel and passengers. Everybody was there. Porky Terrigal, the Reaction Drive Engineer, was working out his frustrations on a huge tray of the sweet and savoury pastries that Sara had produced. Nobody else was eating much and I gained the impression that most of those present would have preferred something much stronger to drink than the hot, innocuous brew from the big silver pot. But we could not afford the risk of taking anything that would dull our perceptions, slow our reaction times. Kinsolving was a world on which anything might hap-

pen and probably would.

Dr. Thorne—bulky, bearded—heaved himself up from his deep chair as we entered. "Ah, Commodore Grimes, Captain Rule . . ." He waved his cup vaguely in our direction and drops of tea spattered on to the already stained shirt bulging above his belt. "And may I—we—ask if anything of consequence has emerged from your deliberations?"

"You may ask, Doctor," replied Grimes mildly. He accepted the cup of tea that Sara Taine poured for him, thanked her. He went to the small settee on which Sonya, his wife, was already seated, took his place beside her.

"Well?" demanded Thorne.

"You asked if you might ask," Grimes told him. "I gave my permission. So ask."

The scientist glared at him, then said, "Has anything of consequence emerged from your deliberations?"

"No," said Grimes. "Meanwhile, have any of you ladies and gentlemen anything to contribute?"

"We've tried rigging bypass circuits," said Terrigal through a minor blizzard of pastry crumbs, "but the wires might as well have been solid insulation."

"And I've taken the Carlotti transceiver down, checked every part, and reassembled it," stated Betty Boops, the Radio Officer. "It should be working perfectly. But there just don't seem to be any stations to send to or receive from."

"Tonight, if the sky is clear," said Loran, Second Officer and navigator, "I shall be able to observe the stars, such as they are out here on the Rim. Then I shall be able to determine if there has been any shift in Space."

"Or Space-Time," said Sonya sombrely. "John and I have been on

this world before. We've had . . . experiences."

*Time travel yet,* I thought glumly. Oh, I know that every time we use the Mannschenn Drive to make an interstellar passage it's time travel of a sort—but, at least, we don't arrive before we've started . . .

"Ken?" asked Grimes, addressing Mayhew.

The tall, wispy telepath started. His thoughts had obviously been very far away. "Oh. Yes. I was trying to get some idea of the local fauna. This place should be over-run with the descendants of the Terran animals brought here by the original colonists. It was, when we landed yesterday. Terran life forms. Our relations, not too distant ones. I could . . . hear them without any trouble. I know what it feels like to be a rabbit. But they aren't here now. No pigs. No rabbits. No hens. The life that is here now I can't get into. I can pick up . . . feelings, primitive, on the lowest level, but they're too alien. Fear, hunger, lust . . . But which is which?"

"And *It?*" asked Grimes.

"*It* has closed *Its* mind to me. But I know that *It's* watching us."

"Mphm," Grimes grunted thoughtfully. Then he addressed Sara Taine. "Miss Taine, is this ship habitable?"

From the very start she had made it obvious that Grimes was one of her pets, but she flared angrily. "Of course, Commodore."

"Dr. Forbes?"

"As, among my other duties, biochemist I must reply in the affirmative, sir." Forbes looked so miserable that I should not have been surprised if he had said that *Basset* was no more than an anteroom to the grave—but Forbes always looked miserable.

"Mr. Canvey? Mr. Terrigal?"

Porky Terrigal answered, "All of our auxiliary machinery is working perfectly, Commodore, even if the drives aren't."

"From the power cells, of course."

"Of course."

It was Bindle, the chief officer, who realised suddenly what Grimes was driving at. He said, "And once the cells are dead, so is the ship."

"So," stated Grimes, "we must do our utmost to conserve electricity. To begin with, ventilation. I'm afraid I must ask you, Captain Rule, to have a few holes cut in the skin of your ship." He read my expression without difficulty. "Don't worry. The charterers will make good any and all damage."

I said stiffly, "I don't see the necessity for piercing the shell, Commodore Grimes. With the airlock door open *and* the cargo ports we shall have through ventilation."

"Shall we?" he asked. "The way I see it, none at all through the forward part of the ship, where we need it most. We don't sleep in the storerooms, cargo holds and engine spaces, you know. Too, open cargo ports would be an invitation to anything large and nasty to walk, crawl or fly in."

"An electric defense and alarm system . . ." began Bindle.

"Power-consuming," said Grimes. He turned back to me. "I suggest a conventional, trimmable cowl-type ventilator at control room level. It will have to be so designed that the shaft can be sealed quickly if and when we are able to get upstairs."

"Cutting holes in the shell plating will consume power," I told him, enjoying my feeble triumph, although not for long.

"Yes, Captain, it will. But sooner or later the cells are going to be drained,

anyhow, and we might well be stuck on this world for a very long time." Then he asked suddenly, addressing *Basset's* ship's company in general, "Do you Sirians go in for barbecues?"

"Of course," answered at least four people, not quite achieving synchronisation.

"Good. As and from breakfast tomorrow all meals, with the exception of dinner, will be cooked outside. The evening meal will be a cold one, starting tonight if Miss Taine has the materials."

"Why?" she asked.

"Because I don't want a fire after sunset that might attract nocturnal predators. Come to that, I don't want any lights showing outside the ship, for the same reason." He got to his feet and addressed us all. "We'll spend the remaining hours of daylight preparing ourselves for a long stay. And we'll start conserving power right now, by switching off every non-essential light strip. With a bit of luck we shall have the back of the job broken before dark, and in the morning we'll go to the city and see if that temple is still there."

"I was afraid that you were going to suggest that," said Sonya.

**I** DIDN'T SLEEP at all well that night.

The ship was too quiet. I missed the sussurus of the forced ventilation, the occasional sob and whine of a pump. And I was conscious of the alien smells—of night-blooming flowers, of rotting vegetation—that drifted through our alleyways, eddied through the open doors of our cabins. In one way the unfamiliar aromas were reassuring, however. They were evidence that the officer of the watch was alert and, in addition to keeping a lookout, was trimming the ventilator on to the shifting breeze. The main

cause of my insomnia, however, was worry. I had allowed my ship to be made unspaceworthy. Her shell had been pierced, was no longer airtight. I had been assured by my engineers that an hour's work, at the outside, would suffice to restore the integrity of the hull, but I still didn't like it. Apart from anything else, such work should be carried out to the requirements and satisfaction of a Lloyd's surveyor—and where was such an official to be found on Kinsolving?

Some time in the small hours I took a long, hard look at myself and found the spectacle amusing. Often in the past, before I attained command, I had laughed at shipmasters whose main exercise of the imagination was to find something to worry about. And there was enough to worry about without dragging Lloyd's of London into it.

I dropped off then, and it seemed that I was almost immediately awoken by Sara. She was bearing not the usual tea tray but a glass of some fruit juice, unchilled. She told me, "The kettle's boiling outside, George. If you want tea you'll have to take your place in the queue by the fire."

I said, "This will do. But it could be colder."

She said, "The refrigerator consumes power. It must be used as little as possible."

The refrigerator was not the only power-consuming equipment in the ship. My morning shower was cold. I like a cold shower when I happen to want one, which is rarely. This was not one of those occasions. I was in a rather bad temper when I joined the others by the fire a few metres from the airlock. But I enjoyed my breakfast—a slab of steak grilled on a steel plate over the hot coals, a mug

of tea that had acquired a pleasantly unfamiliar smoky tang. This sort of living would be very nice until the novelty wore off.

BOTH BOATS—our own lifeboat and the pinnace that was on loan from the Rim Worlds Navy—were inoperative. Each of the small craft had its own hydrogen fusion power unit, and each of these units behaved in the same inexplicable manner as the big one in the ship. Power was being generated but just wasn't getting as far as the boats' inertial drive or even, in the case of the Rim Worlds Navy pinnace, as far as the laser cannon.

So, if we wished to revisit the city, we should have to walk. To *revisit* the city? As I have said, it didn't look the same as it had done. It looked further away than it had been. Unluckily the night had been overcast, so Loran had been unable to make any astronomical observations. We knew only that we were on Kinsolving. We did not know where or when Kinsolving was now. Perhaps, in the city, we should find out.

A party was organised. Grimes, of course, was the leader. Sonya was with him. Reluctantly Dr. Thorne and his wife decided to stay with the ship. The scientist was a realist and knew that he was not fit enough for the march through the jungle. I thought myself that Rose Thorne could have coped—she was one of those wispy little women who're fantastically tough under their seemingly frail exteriors—but she was loyal to her husband. Bill Smith and Susan Howard were to represent the scientists. They looked fit enough, both of them, in their mousy way. Ken Mayhew was in the party but Clarisse was staying aboard *Basset*. This would ensure that we were in psionic contact at all times

with our base. I was going along, much to Bindle's disgust. He complained that he had been confined to the ship ever since the landing. I told him that there must be somebody there capable and qualified to take command during my absence. Finally Sara, our weapons expert, completed the party. Her accurate shooting had saved us all when, with one short burst, she had severed the wire that tethered us to a dimension where we did not belong.

(As a matter of fact she had told me, in confidence, that her shooting had not been all that marvellous. "Imagine a pistol range," she said. "Imagine a standard target, complete with bull's eye. You're trying to hit the bull. To use big gun phraeology you're having to both lay and train. Then you have the card set up edgewise to you. You split it. Everybody thinks it's marvellous shooting. But it's not—because you don't have to worry about gunlaying. Training is all that counts . . .")

So we set out. Luckily we had laid in a stock, as recommended by Grimes, of tough drill clothing and heavy boots before lifting off from Port Forlorn. Luckily we had loaded all sorts of other equipment that I, in my innocence, had thought that we should never need. But I'm a merchant spaceman, pure and simple, whereas Grimes had been brought up in the Federation Survey Service. The RSS, in spite of its name, is more of a fighting navy than anything else but its personnel are, now and again, required to do actual survey work such as exploration. So we had machetes for hacking our way through the jungle and magnetic compasses to ensure that we hacked away in the right direction.

Before starting out we took a care-

ful bearing of the city from the control room. Grimes noted that a prominent tree that we should be able to see from ground level was on this line of sight. Then, standing directly below the ship, he took another bearing of this tree. I asked him why he was doing this.

He replied, "There's such a thing as magnetic deviation, George. In the control room our compasses were affected by all manner of fields, some permanent, some residual. Outside the ship the effect is not so great—although I hope that it's not enough to throw us out too badly . . ."

We set off, Grimes in the lead, holding his compass, Bill Smith and Susan Howard, wielding machetes almost expertly. Now and again he would pause to let the two young scientists go ahead to clear a way. Sonya and myself, sub-machine guns cocked and ready, followed. Then came Ken Mayhew—armed, but with his weapon slung—and Sara Taine, her automatic carbine in her capable hands. We had one laser pistol, carried by Grimes in a holster, but it was not to be used unless it was absolutely essential. We did not know when, if ever, we should be able to recharge its power cell. (Come to that, when our ammunition for the projectile weapons was exhausted there would be no way of replacing it. The commodore had already suggested to the engineers that they might try to manufacture some arbalests . . .)

It was hot under the trees, hot and damp. We were ankle-deep in decayed vegetation that squelched unpleasantly as we walked. The trees were . . . trees. I'm no botanist. Their tall, straight trunks, exploding many metres above ground level into clouds of green and yellow foliage,

were obscured by broad-leaved, sharp-spined creepers that, stretching horizontally between the trees, formed a natural barbed wire entanglement. We did not see any large animal life although we heard things scuttling in the undergrowth. There were flying things—*insects*?—but they did not come near us. There was something else—reptile? mammal?—that could almost have been a scale model of an ancient biplane. We were not able to make a close examination of it, nor did we much wish to.

We pressed on, sweating profusely. After a while Sonya and I relieved Bill Smith and Susan Howard at the head of our little column. Grimes, as navigator, was exempt from machete work. Mayhew, as our psionic lookout, was likewise exempt. So was Sara; if there were any chopping to be done with a sub-machine gun she was the one best qualified to do it. I soon began to wish that I too was exempt from the manual work. Those strands of creeper not only looked like barbed wire, they were almost as tough. We should have brought along a whetstone. I said as much to the commodore. He grunted, muttering that a man cannot think of everything. His wife—her hands were as blistered as mine—told him tartly that to think of everything was his job. He made no reply.

At last we became aware that the trees were thinning out. More direct sunlight was striking through the high foliage and there were quite long stretches not obstructed by that infernal, thorny creeper. Too, the ground was drier underfoot and the dead leaves were crackling rather than squelching. Under the leaves was a hard surface. We paused and Sonya and I squatted, clearing the dead vegetation away with our hands. What

we uncovered was, we decided at length, artificial—but old, very old. A sort of concrete it could have been, weathered and stained with exudations. It was a dirty yellow rather than grey.

"Follow the yellow brick road," said Grimes. He was obviously quoting from some work unfamiliar to me. Sonya and Mayhew rewarded him with a small burst of laughter. He sang untunefully, "We're off to see the Wizard . . ." There was more laughter while Sara, the two young scientists and myself looked at him incomprehendingly.

We marched on. It was not hard to follow the road. It was almost an avenue, with the tall trees on either side of it. Had it been straight we should have seen the city long before we did. The first sight we had of it as we rounded a wide bend was a lofty tower, a structure that must have been loftier still before its upper levels had crumbled, had fallen to a heap of rubble around its base. There were more towers, a vista of them before us. None was intact. They were like guttered candles, their flames long extinguished. This was, I realised, the city that we had seen, but briefly, when making our escape from the temple.

Guttered candles . . .

The towers on the outskirts of the city had been smashed, those towards the centre had been . . . melted. As we walked along the radial street, surprisingly free of vegetation, we realised that the heat, whatever had caused it, had been of greater intensity towards the centre of the town. I'm a merchant spaceman but I'm also a naval reserve officer. I know something about weapons. I've taken all the required courses, seen the films. I didn't have to ask Grimes what de-

structive agent had been unloosed here—how long ago? Already I'd have been willing to predict what we would find at ground zero. I did not think that it would have been damaged by blast or radiation.

We marched on.

Apart from half melted rubble from the towers the streets—the ringroads and the radial thoroughfares—were remarkably free of debris. There were not, as there had been in that other city in this place, *our* city, the carcasses of long-abandoned vehicles. Grimes suggested that we investigate one of the towers before we pressed on further. We did so, entering cautiously through an open door that obviously had not been designed for use by beings even remotely human. It was too low, too wide. The beams of our torches augmented the daylight that seeped through the dust-encrusted windows. The ground level seemed to be no more than a sort of vestibule. In the centre of it was a group of statuary. Possibly it had once been an ornamental fountain. Two many-limbed beings were locked either in combat or copulation. They were, Mayhew told us, like the dead arthropod that he and Clarisse had found in that weird cavern at the heart of the planet, that we had tried to drag out and up with one of the sounding machines. Statues of the beings who had built—and destroyed?—this city, or of familiar or mythological animals? (Alien travellers coming upon some long-deserted human city might assume, from the evidence of statuary in public places, that such beings as mermaids and mermen actually once existed.)

"These were the people," said Mayhew slowly. "Arthropods, like giant Terran crabs. But that should not be surprising. After all we, in *our*

universe, are familiar enough with the Shaara. And they're arthropods."

Grimes said, "It's easy to accept the idea of bee-like beings building up a technological civilisation. But crabs or lobsters . . ."

"Why not?" asked Mayhew. He shone the beam of his torch on to one of the statues. "Look at the way in which these forelimbs terminate in handling' tools—some for coarse, heavy work, some for the most delicate operations. Everything from shifting spanners . . ." the light shifted . . . "to micrometers. One hand—if I may call it a hand—for building a steam engine, another for repairing a lady's watch . . ."

"Mphm," grunted Grimes. "And do you *feel* anything, Ken? Did these beings leave any . . . record? Any . . . ghosts, like the ghost that George saw in the city, the other city, the first time?"

"They may have done, John—but I can't . . . receive. How shall I put it? It's like expecting a Carlotti receiver to pick up a Normal Space Time transmission, or the other way round. This place was lived in, once. I can tell you that much. But it was so long ago that the . . . records have faded, and even if they hadn't . . ."

We looked at the statues a little while longer. The group compelled interest but it was not the sort of thing I'd have liked to have lived with. And then we went slowly up the ramp that, following the curvature of the inner wall, took us up to the next level. There were living quarters there. There was furniture that might, conceivably, have been beds and chairs. There were what could have been bathrooms—or kitchens. There was one room that could have been a playroom or a workroom, and in this, on a low table, was a beautiful ship

model. It was a greatly scaled down replica of the airship that we had seen, a little less than a metre in length, a cylinder, hemispherical at its ends, with a profusion of vanes protruding at odd angles, with what could have been gun turrets.

We took photographs—I should dearly have loved to have taken that airship model and not merely its picture, but we were already loaded with weapons and other equipment—and then made our way out of the ruined tower and continued our march to the city centre. We did not have much time to spare; the sun was approaching the meridian and we were determined to be back aboard *Basset* before dark.

The commodore had put his compass away. Mayhew was now our direction finder. He was homing on the temple—or whatever form it had assumed in this otherwhen universe.

We found it without difficulty. It was as we had seen it before—a featureless, subtly distorted cube. It stood by itself, at the intersection of imaginary diagonals drawn between four towers—or what had, once, been towers. Now they were little more than shapeless mounds of slag. Not far from the building was a little pile of bright, twisted metal. It looked somehow familiar. We walked to it cautiously, inspected it. It was the wreckage of one of the sounding machines that we had used to rescue Ken and Clarisse. It was the one that the boat had dragged up from the roof of the temple by the power lead. A length of insulated cable was still plugged into it, and from the winch drum extended a tangle of piano wire.

But the door of the temple was no longer rectangular but more nearly an ellipse. And the lettering over it was in no familiar script but an inde-

cipherable scrawl. It looked, I thought, like the record left by the claws of a crustacean on damp sand.

"Here's your sounding machine, George," said Grimes. "Or one of them. I wonder if the other one is still on the roof . . ."

"If we could get there we could find out," I said shortly. There was no way of scaling those featureless walls.

"We can go inside the temple," said Grimes.

"Do we want to?" asked Sonya sharply.

"What did we come out here for?" he countered. Then, to Mayhew, "Ken, do you feel anything now?"

"No more than before," replied the telepath. "It is aware that we are here. What Its intentions are I cannot say."

We went to the door. We pushed it. It showed no signs of giving. And then somebody thought of applying a sidewise pressure. The panel moved then, reluctantly at first and then easily, sliding clear of the oval opening. We entered the temple.

There was light of a sort in the huge, windowless room, a grey, shifting twilight. As before there was the wrongness of the angles where wall met wall, ceiling and floor. There was the distortion of Space, of Space-Time. When we spoke it was like being inside an echo chamber—not that any of us did much speaking. The . . . the altar was still there—but why should it not have been? The altar—coffin or tesseract, or both, shining wanly with a light that, somehow, was not light, a dead, ashy radiance.

But there were changes. The shape of the door, and the inscription over it. And the hole that we had cut in the roof was no longer there, and there were no marks on the smooth

ceiling to show that it ever had been. (In this Time and Space it never had been.)

"What now?" asked Sonya.

"What now?" repeated Grimes. "Well, I suppose we find out if the . . . altar is still functioning." He asked sardonically, "Any volunteers? No? Then can somebody spare something that we can throw into the gateway to the interior?"

"Your pipe," suggested his wife.

He said, "I was brought up never make sacrifices to strange gods. And that *would* be a sacrifice . . . talking of sacrifices—any virgins among those present?"

Susan Howard blushed painfully. Sonya said sharply, "That wasn't funny, John."

"My apologies. Miss Howard." Grimes could turn on the charm when he wanted to. "Believe me, I had no idea . . ."

Grimes had opened his pack, taken from it the little parcel of sandwiches that was to be his midday meal. He said, "And now I must apologise to you, Sara. But I can spare one of these dainties; since I have been aboard *Basset* I have been eating too much. Which shall it be? The cheese, I think . . ."

He tossed the little square of filled bread into the tesseract. It faded, vanished.

"So . . ." he murmured.

"What now?" demanded Sonya.

"We go outside, sit down, enjoy our lunch, and then return to the ship."

"You mean to say that we've come all this way just to watch you waste good food?"

"We must be back before dark, my dear. Our expedition has not been altogether fruitless. We know that we have suffered dimensional displace-

ment. We know that the temple still exists, and that the gateway to *It* is still open."

"And we know that *It* likes cheese sandwiches," said Sara. "At least, *It* didn't spit out the one you fed it . . ."

We all laughed. There was precious little to laugh about so we made the best of what we had.

We left the temple. We sat down on the ground a respectable distance from the building, made a sketchy meal of sandwiches and coffee from our vacuum flasks. When we had finished I walked over to the twisted wreckage of the sounding machine. It looked as though somebody had tried to turn it inside out, not altogether unsuccessfully. Suppose that this had happened to us . . . I thought. But it hadn't, so why worry about it? Or—the idea sent a cold chill down my spine—perhaps it had, and we didn't know about it, whereas that metallic tangle would look the way it had looked in *our* universe . . .

Then the others got to their feet and we started the march back to the ship. I hoped that she would still be where we had left her. Mayhew, reading my thoughts, assured me that she would be.

**W**E CAME to the outskirts of the city, to the tower that we had entered earlier. I said to Grimes, "Wait a couple of minutes, Commodore."

"What for?" he asked.

"That airship—or spaceship—model. I'm going to pick it up. I think that we should examine it properly when we get back to *Basset*."

He said, "You'll be carrying it. It's your idea, so you do the work." He relented slightly. "If it's too heavy we'll distribute your other bits and pieces among the rest of us."

Sara accompanied me into the building. She hadn't fired a shot all day and was, I was sure, hoping that something would spring out at us from the shadows. She was disappointed. I was not. The beautiful little ship model was where we had last seen it. (There was no reason why it shouldn't have been, but on Kinsolving one takes nothing for granted.) I picked it up. It was heavy, too damned heavy. Holding it carefully in my arms I made my way down the ramp, followed by Sara. It seemed to me that it was not so heavy as it had first been and assumed that it was because I had adjusted to the weight and the awkwardness. When I was outside the others gathered round to look at it, to admire it. It gleamed brightly in the sunlight, its vanes like metal mirrors. There was surprisingly little dust on it.

"It could almost be a lightjammer," said Grimes at last. "If the sails were larger . . ."

"Lightjammer or not," I quipped, "it's certainly not light . . ."

But wasn't it? There was almost no strain on my arms now. And what was that vibration that I could feel? What was the almost inaudible hum that I could hear? And was I the only one hearing it? Somehow it reminded me of being in the control room of a ship, listening to the quiet song of her machinery, main and auxiliary, conscious that the vessel was part of me, no more (and no less) than an extension of my own body. A touch of a finger, and she would lift . . .

She lifted.

I was as amazed as the others. I stood there, mouth open, gazing at the glittering machine rising slowly into the clear sky.

"Captain Rule," said Mayhew sharply, "bring it back."

"But how, Ken? How?"

"The same way that you got it up," he told me. "You're in a control room. Your control room. You are the ship. The ship is you . . ."

Fantastically I was looking down at the group outside the ruined tower, on the fringe of the jungle. I could see my own face among the upturned visages. And that was my marker beacon for the landing. I came down slowly, carefully; I hadn't got the feel of this vessel yet but knew that distortion of the vanes would reduce their power-collecting efficiency. Where that knowledge came from I did not know. It was just there. I was more concerned about the possibility of damage to the ship than to myself, notwithstanding the fact that my body was the target that I was aiming for.

The little ship settled gently into my outstretched arms. *A nice piece of piloteage*, I thought smugly.

And then I stared at the thing that I was holding like a baby. *What the hell was happening? And what was I doing, and how the hell was I doing it? Was this model a toy, a robot toy, at least partly sentient?*

"Not a toy," said Mayhew. "Not a toy, but a simulator . . ."

"A simulator?"

Mayhew laughed softly. "Yes. And you, Captain, were the first spaceman with whom its been in contact for the Odd Gods of the Galaxy alone know how many millenia. You've heard of imprinting?"

"Of course. But this is a . . . machine, not an animal."

"And aren't animals machines?" countered Mayhew. "Including ourselves."

This was cheating, I thought. It was the sort of argument that one might expect from a materialist, but not from one whose profession, to many

people, smacked of the supernatural.

"So the builders of this city were, in some ways, more advanced than ourselves," said Grimes. "So they could control their machines directly by thought . . . Mphm. I wonder if that thing will take my orders . . . I'm a shipmaster, like you, so there should be some affinity . . ."

He stared at the ship model, scowling with concentration. "Lift," I heard him mutter. "Lift!"

Nothing happened.

Sonya tried, then Sara, then the two young scientists, and finally Mayhew. The model stayed snugly in my arms. After they had all given up I sent the thing aloft, drove it around above our heads in a tight circle, made it dive and soar and, finally, hover.

"It's your pet," Grimes admitted. "It's your . . . doggy."

"It's a pity," said Sonya, "that the engineers will have to take it to pieces to see what makes it tick."

"Why should they?" I demanded.

She said, "It's obvious that, somehow, this toy converts radiation into power, usable power. Anti-gravity, perhaps. And power is just what we need right now."

I said, "And if my ham-handed mechanics ruin this machine without finding out what makes it work—don't forget that I know them better than you do—we shall be no better off than we are now. On the other hand, if we keep it intact we shall have a means of lugging supplies from the ship to wherever we need them. I . . . I *feel*, somehow, that it will be capable of lifting quite a big weight."

"Mphm," grunted Grimes. "Perhaps we can find out right now just what it can do."

"No," I said. "That will have to wait until we get back to the ship.

The engineers will have to make some sort of harness that will fit around the hull without damaging, or even touching the vanes. Don't ask me how I know—I just do—but those surfaces must be at exact angles each to the other."

"Oh, well," said Grimes, "at least you won't have to carry it back to the ship. So you can have your rifle and machete back . . ."

But there was one consolation. As I was fully occupied during the march in steering the model through the forest—I kept it below treetop level—I was exempt from the task of hacking a way through the undergrowth. We had expected that this would not be necessary, that we would be able to keep to the path that we had cleared on our way out to the city, but those vines, in a few hours, had repaired the damage that we had inflicted upon them. The severed ends had reunited themselves. The tangle was even worse than it had been before.

**W**E GOT BACK to the ship just before sunset. The others already knew what we had done and seen; Mayhew had been in contact with Clarisse throughout and she had passed on the information.

They were all eager to see the model flying machine—and were all disappointed to discover that it could be handled by nobody except myself. The engineers, of course, were itching to get their greasy paws on to it, into it. Grimes and I told them that it was too potentially valuable to us to risk its being rendered inoperative by clueless tampering. If they wanted to do something useful, I said, they could make a sort of harness to fit around its fuselage, the straps of which must not make even the

slightest contact with any of the vanes.

I put the model, the simulator, through its paces in front of an admiring, (possibly) and envious (definitely) audience. I had really gotten the feel of it during our march back from the city. I wished that I had a real ship to play with this way. In such a vessel pilotage would be unalloyed pleasure . . .

Inevitably the thing acquired a name—two names, in fact. It was Bindle who referred to it as a winged *wurst*. It had never occurred to me until then that the hull was sausage shaped. And Betty Boops called it "the captain's doggy". It wasn't long before some genius came up with a new verse to the Dog Star Line's anthem which everybody had to sing, with the usual *arf, arf!* accompaniment.

*How much is that doggy in the window?*

*It looks like a sort of a wurst;*

*You can't have that doggy in the window,*

*Because the Old Man saw it first!*

Very funny, I thought. Very funny. But they were jealous, that was all.

We had our evening meal and then I put my doggy through more trials in the darkness. It functioned as well as it had done in broad daylight. Either it had very efficient storage batteries or there was enough radiation, even from the night sky of the Rim, to keep it going. The two engineers watched wistfully. I decided that, to be on the safe side, I would take my pet to bed with me.

The next morning we set out early. The party was as before but we had an easier time of it; the harness that the engineers had devised from wires and webbing allowed us to hang most of our equipment from the little ship.

It looked absurd—imagine a balloon with a basket far larger than the gasbag—but it worked. And we knew, having made the experiment, that the machine could lift two people together with their equipment. One of those persons would have to be me—the captain's doggy was a one man dog—and the other was to be Sara. It was possible that some fast and accurate shooting might be necessary.

We hacked our way through that blasted jungle again. Sonya remarked that it was a pity that I had not found a robot bulldozer. We came at last to the city. We ignored the ruined towers, went straight to the temple. I brought my doggy to ground level and we unloaded the equipment. Then I arranged the dangling slings to form a sort of seat and went for my first flight. It was very little different from the other flights that I had handled from ground level. I just . . . thought myself into the air, just thought myself to the roof of the temple. It was very little different, after all, from handling a big ship, except that I wasn't having to use my hands to actuate the controls on a panel. I didn't bother to land on the rooftop, just hovered over it. The smooth surface was unmarked. There was no sign of the other sounding machine. But it didn't matter. We now had something far better than those primitive winches.

I returned to the ground, extricated myself from the harness.

We walked into the temple. I brought my doggy in after us. We looked at the altar. Grimes asked, "Are you sure that you don't mind risking it, George?"

I didn't feel especially heroic, but somebody (I supposed) had to go down to where Mayhew and Clarisse

had gone. Somebody had to try to find out what made this planet tick. The only reason why it had to be me was that I was the only one with control over a means of transportation.

Sara and I assembled the pieces of equipment that we should need. A sound-powered telephone, with a sufficiency of wire. Two powerful torches. A laser pistol each. A projectile pistol for myself; a sub-machine gun for Sara. Ammunition. A camera. Food pellets. (I hated the things, but they were easily portable nourishment should it be required.) Water flasks.

Hung around with gear like Christmas trees we strapped ourselves into the harness. I must confess that I rather enjoyed this forced close bodily contact with Sara. She seemed to read my thoughts, murmured, "George . . . At last!"

I said, "Secure all for lift off!"

She replied, "All secure, captain."

Grimes said, "No heroics, George. If you're at all in doubt, get the hell out!"

"He's a poet and doesn't know it," quipped Sonya.

Then, obedient to my unspoken command, the little ship lifted, raising us from the floor. I looked up, was relieved to see that there was still ample clearance between it and the roof of the temple. I applied lateral thrust and we drifted slowly over the altar, then hovered. I looked down. If I hadn't been an experienced space-man I'd have changed my mind about making the descent. It was like—much too like—space as seen from the viewports of a ship running under Mannschenn Drive. There was the slowly shifting . . . formlessness, the darkness that was deeper than darkness should ever be, the ultimate night.

"Ready?" I asked Sara.

"Ready," she whispered.

We dropped slowly.

Grimes and Sonya, Mayhew and Bill and Susan, stood there, watching us go. They looked like reflections of themselves in the distorting mirrors of a fun fair, but not at all funny. Their greatly elongated bodies wavered like candle flames in a draught, shimmered and faded. Grimes raised his hand and his arm seemed to stretch to an impossible length. Sonya said something and her voice was no more than a faraway sighing, long drawn out, like wind soughing drearily over a field of rocks and snow.

Then they were gone.

They were gone, whirled away into the far distance, fading, diminishing, tumbling down and through the dark dimensions. They were gone—but we, ourselves, did not seem to be moving. Around us was nothingness, but I sensed the fast approach of solidity from below. I realised that the model was equipped with the same sensory devices—radar—as a full-sized ship, and that those sensors were . . . mine.

I slowed our rate of descent so that we were falling gently as a feather. My boot soles made gentle contact with a hard surface. I said, "We're here."

Sara complained, "You may be, but I'm not. Even when I stretch my toes are only just touching."

I brought the doggy down a few more centimetres.

Mayhew had told us of a vast chamber with shifting, pulsing lights. And that is where we were. Stalactites and stalagmites of iridescence were its pillars and its roof was one enormous rainbow, the colours of which swept in steady procession up from the far distance to one side of us, setting in the far distance to the

other. You know those coin-in-the-slot synthesisers that provide music in some taverns? That was the general effect. Mayhew and Clarisse, being in direct telepathic contact with the godlike planetary intelligence, had been awed. Sara and I, non-telepaths, were awed too—but mingled with our awe was a touch of contempt for the gaudiness, the . . . *kitsch* of it all.

"Not very neat," she whispered, "but definitely gaudy."

We looked around us. There, and there, and there were the dessicated bodies of the explorers who had perished here from time to time in the past, a Past so remote that it was unimaginable. There were the centauroid beings. There were other things that were more or less human. There was the arthropod, like a huge crab, like the creatures which had been immortalised in enduring metal in that group of statuary. Attached to it was a bright, tangled filament, piano wire, the sounding machine line by which we had tried to drag it to the surface.

A voice sounded in the single receiver of my headset. "George! Are you all right? Report, please."

"We're all right, Commodore," I replied. "We're in the cave described by Ken. There are the lights, and the bodies. How much wire have you for the telephone? We shall want to move around."

He said, "We can splice on at least another kilometre if we have to. Keep on reporting, will you?"

"Wilco," I said.

I thought of unbuckling Sara and myself from the harness so that we could continue our exploration on foot, then decided against it. We would be able to cover a far greater distance in far less time using my doggy. Obedient to my unspoken

command it lifted us clear of the floor of the cave, flew towards a pillar of pulsing light that seemed, somehow, to be an important part of the . . . machinery? I don't know why I thought that it was important, it was just a hunch. But when you've been using machines of various kinds all your life you develop a feel for them, even when you're not an engineer. And the first saboteurs must have known, instinctively, just where in the works to throw their wooden shoes to cause the maximum disruption.

Grimes spoke to me again. "Be careful," he said. "Ken tells me that *It* knows that you're down there. *It's* puzzled. *It* can't read your mind the same way that it read Ken's."

I said, "My nose fair bleeds for *It*."

We drifted slowly over the long-dead bodies. I paused above two of the humanoids. Before they dried out they must have been very like ourselves, I thought. Their faces were upturned; their expressions seemed to change, their limbs to stir under the continually shifting lights. *Humanoid?* Human, rather. A man and a woman, who must have been handsome before the skin was stretched so tightly over their bones. How long ago had they died? How had they died?

Reluctantly I came in to a landing. Sara and I unbuckled ourselves from the harness. The doggy hung there, humming faintly, like a faithful hound awaiting orders. We walked slowly towards the bodies. I knelt beside that of the man, pulled what was a weapon of some kind from the holster at his wide belt of metal mesh. It was a pistol, although not a projectile weapon. I found the firing stud and, foolishly, pressed it. Nothing happened, of course. Its power cell was very dead.

Sara removed a bracelet from the woman's wrist. She said, "This is like grave-robbing, but . . ." Then, "This must be a watch . . . There's a dial, but blank. And a stud that you press . . . And nothing happens."

"Batteries have a limited life span," I said. "Even when they're not being used, there's leakage. H'm. These people had a level of technology not dissimilar to our own. Their clothing could be plastic . . ." Both man and woman were wearing kilt and shirt, dull green in colour, heavy sandals. I lifted the hem of the man's kilt, rubbed it between my fingers. The material crumbled to a fine powder.

"Not dissimilar," agreed Sara, "and certainly not superior. I, for one, wouldn't like to walk around not knowing when I was going to do an involuntary strip act."

"This stuff is old." I told her.

"So's Doggy old, but she's functioning well enough."

"She's metal," I said.

"Metal, shmetal," she sneered.

"What are you arguing about?" demanded Grimes. He could hear my voice, of course, through the throat microphone but was getting only one side of the conversation.

I made a brief report.

"Get photographs," he ordered. "Clothed, then unclothed."

"You want us to strip the corpses?" I asked, shocked.

"They won't mind," he said callously.

"I'm not some sort of ghoul, or necrophiliac, Commodore," I protested.

"This is a scientific expedition," he said.

"I'm not a scientist," I told him.

"You're under charter to a scientific expedition, Captain Rule. And the terms of the charter party, which you signed, require that you render every

assistance to the scientists."

He was right, of course. I told Sara what he wanted and we got the first of the photographs. Then we set about the distasteful task that I couldn't help thinking of as desecration, Sara removing the woman's clothing, myself the man's. Fortunately there was very little handling involved; the plastic material disintegrated at a touch, leaving only the metallic belts, sandal buckles and the like. The male, allowing for dessication over the aeons, looked normal enough. So did the female, apart from a pair of secondary nipples under her breasts. There was no body hair on either of them—but many human peoples practice depilation and, come to that, extra pairs of breasts aren't all that uncommon.

We put the metal articles into the specimen bag and then got back into the harness. Obedient as ever Doggy lifted and headed towards our original objective. There were no more corpses between us and that pillar of multicoloured light. There was no reason for us to stop, to delay the . . . The confrontation?

Mayhew's voice came through the earpiece. "George It's aware of you. Be careful!"

*Now he tells me, I thought.*

"George I think you'd better turn back!"

Then Grimes, "Captain Rule, return to the surface. That's an order"

I said to Sara, "They're scared of something. They want us to return."

She replied, "Then we return." I heard the sharp click as she cocked her sub-machine gun. "I've a feeling myself that we've overstayed our welcome."

Doggy came round in a wide arc. We should have no trouble finding our way to the . . . the exit; all that I

had to do was follow the cable of the sound-powered telephone. Doggy came round in a wide arc—and kept on coming, steadily up, once again, on the pillar of light.

"Come round, you little bitch" I muttered. "Come *round*, damn you" It was happening the way it sometimes happens with big ships, no matter what you do, no matter what you try they seem to exhibit a will of their own. And was Doggy exhibiting a will of *her* own? I did not think so. She was *mine*, or had been mine, but now some other intelligence was taking over from me in that miniaturised control room.

I . . . concentrated. I couldn't turn her again, but I could—but for how much longer?—check her progress towards the column of luminescence. She wanted to obey me—I felt—but a stronger will than mine was taking her over. It was she and me against . . . *It*. Two against one. A human mind and a low grade robot intelligence against a near deity. But it wasn't a real god, I told myself. It was only a robot with all a robot's limitations. (And so was Doggy, come to that, a very minor robot, and I was only a human.)

She was faithful to me. I was the prince who had awakened her from her aeons long slumber. She was imprinted on me. She was trying to obey my orders. But *something* had hold of her leash and was . . . pulling. She had all four paws dug in yet was slowly being dragged forward.

"Bail out" I ordered Sara.

She unsnapped her buckles, dropped to the ground. I followed her. We stood there helplessly watching Doggy's struggles. She would jerk back half a metre and then, slowly, slowly, would lose all that she had gained, and more. And I identified

with her, as any shipmaster always identifies with his vessel. Oh, she was only a model, and she hadn't been made by beings even remotely humanoid but, from the start, there had been symbiosis.

"If we lose her," whispered Sara, "we've had it . . ."

Oddly enough that aspect of it all hadn't occurred to me until Sara put it into words. And then I felt fear, fear such as I had never known before in my entire career—and I admit that I've been scared stiff more than once.

Sara opened fire on the pillar of flame. It may have done some good—or harm, according to the viewpoint—but there were no visual indications that anything was being accomplished. The stream of tracer just lost itself in the greater luminosity of the column of light. I pulled my own pistol from its holster. I realised, after I had it out, that it was the laser and not the projectile weapon. And what could it do that the heavy slugs could not?

But . . .

Hastily I set the weapon to wide beam. I took aim, pressed the firing stud. I aimed not at the flaming pillar but at Doggy. The dazzling light fell full on the vanes projecting from her sleek body. Radiation was what she fed on, what gave her strength. Perhaps . . .

"Turn," I whispered, vocalising my thoughts. "Turn. . . Turn. . ."

She turned, not slowly, spinning on her short axis.

"Steady, now, steady as you go. . . Accelerate!" And, "Run!" I shouted to Sara. "Run! Follow the telephone line!"

We ran. Luckily the cavern floor was smooth, as most of my attention was devoted to Doggy. I had to stop her at the point where the telephone

wire curved up from the horizontal to the vertical. The headset itself I tore off, dropped. There was too much risk of my becoming entangled in the wire.

Ahead of us Doggy hesitated, started to swing back towards us. I could see that as yet she was nowhere near the opening of the shaft to the upper world. I gave her another burst from my laser pistol—and, her cells recharged, she came once again under my control.

We ran past the bodies of the two humans. Briefly I wondered if we should join them. We dashed through a curtain of cold, blue fire that suddenly rose from the cavern floor. Doggy, I saw, had reached the vertical telephone wire. She was waiting for us. Had I ordered her to do so? I could not remember.

Another curtain of fire, and another... A weapon, possibly, a weapon evolved for use against some other life form than ourselves. So *It* wasn't so bloody omniscient, omnipotent after all. These pyrotechnics, frightening as they were, weren't hurting us.

We were under the telephone cable—a filament stretching upwards into... nothingness. We were under the waiting Doggy. The high pitched whine that she was emitting set my teeth on edge. *Down!* I thought imperatively. *Down!*

She dropped slowly. With fumbling fingers I caught the dangling harness, strapped Sara in and then myself.

*Up... Up... Lift, you bitch!*  
*Lift!*

We could feel the tension in the straps but our feet were still firmly on the ground. And something was happening in the cavern. Lights were flashing all around us and the "sky" was a terrifying sheet of multi-

coloured flame.

*Lift!* I commanded. *Lift!*

The bodies of the other explorers, the long-dead beings who had preceded us, were on their feet, animated by some force that had taken control of them, were shambling towards us, stiffly, jerkily. The naked, skeletal man and woman... the centaurs... a thing like a big-headed dinosaur... the giant arthropod. Like robots they advanced, walking at first, then crawling as the stream of tracer from Sara's gun hosed into them, knocking them from their feet, shattering fragile limbs. And then only the great crab was left, its carapace split in a dozen places, but three of its spindly legs still functional and one horrid claw raised menacingly.

Doggy was whining and straining but she still could not lift our weight.

I pulled my laser pistol again. I hated having to do it. It was like (I imagine) flogging a faithful, willing but utterly exhausted horse. I let her have a burst of energy in the belly. She screamed. But we were rising at last, slowly at first then faster, faster, through a darkness that was utter emptiness rather than the mere absence of a light source. We were lifting. We...

With a dreadful certainty I knew that we were falling again. Again I used my laser pistol. Again Doggy screamed.

And Sara screamed. An arm, attenuated, enormously long, was reaching for us, the fingers of the hand writhing like tentacles. She was swinging her gun around to bear upon this apparition. Just in time to prevent her from firing I caught her wrist. In spite of the distortion I had recognised the unusual ring on one of the fingers, a wide band cut from

Carinthian black opal on which was mounted a spiral nebula in silver filagree. Sonya's ring.

Other arms stretched out for us, other hands. They caught hold of us, of the harness. They dragged us away from the altar, into the temple.

We saw them standing around us, their faces pale, strained.

"Unbuckle yourselves" Grimss shouted. "Hurry! Hurry!"

And there was need for haste. Doggy screamed for the last time as fire flashed from her miniature ports, from the tips of her vanes. She fell heavily, with a clattering crash, just missing Sara and myself as we scram-

bled clear from the tangle of webbing. There was a trickle of blue smoke from her, bearing the acridity of hot metal.

Grimes said, his voice shaky, "I thought you'd had it . . ." He went on, "But you're back . . ."

"Thanks to Doggy," I said. I looked down at the pitiful little heap of wreckage. "You know, if we get out of this mess I'm going to keep her at home, with my other souvenirs, in a glass case . . ."

"Doggy in the window," said Sara.

I was the only one who didn't think it funny.

—A. BERTRAM CHANDLER

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### Duel (cont. from page 29)

the final act.

AN HOUR PASSED. All about me were only the sounds of the grazing horses in the distance. In the bright moonlight I could see nearly as far as during the day.

Midnight approached. And another five minutes, and I had begun to fear that Gulchin had failed me. Then I heard her, coming from the far side of the plain, as though returning from a journey, as we had planned.

She was visible for nearly a mile as she came toward us. The Cat couldn't fail to see her.

Gulchin drew nearer, made to pass my hiding place—

And the moment had come!

A shadow eased out from the

corner of the rock wall—I even thought I could detect a fringe of black hair. I trained my rifle on the spot. If the Cat moved into view it was dead.

It moved into view—and I pulled the trigger.

The trap had been sprung

At the exact instant I fired the unwounded Cat erupted from the cliff edge and passed the girl, so swiftly that I never actually saw it, merely retaining a swift imprint of its outline on my retinas.

Now it was on the rock, facing me, and I had another split second to realize that I had not been the one to spring the final trap—before the Cat reached me.

—CHARLES V. DE VET

*He was the product of years of research and careful planning—but they'd given him no identity!*

# EXIGENCY & MARTIN HEIDEGGER

## JAMES SALLIS

ILLUSTRATED by JOE STATON

I SAT FAR BACK in the darkness of the alley, my feet braced against whatever I could find, which happened to be a Dempster Dumpster and a brick wall, knees up and the gun out before me in the best two-handed grip, arms on my knees—about the size of a cigarette package and silent, the gun had, I had been told, the recoil of an elephant rifle, and could take a man's arm off—and waited. Sooner or later they would come around the corner, or down off one of the roofs. Then I would probably die.

In the back of my mind, I was thinking two things. (The front was occupied with the question of death, not exactly a new prospect for me.) First, what would Heidegger say about all this? My brother was the authority; I wished I could call and ask. Second, what would The People make of my body?

I do not, you see, officially exist. There is no record of my birth, my fingerprints are not on file anywhere in the world, I have no vital statistics, I do not even have a name. I am the product of sperm and ova brought to-

gether in a nutrient chamber—the genetics had been carefully considered—and later transplanted into the body of a young girl whom I knew only as Twelve. Twelve, I had met, but the only "parents" I really knew were a group of international scientists, pacifists every one of them, who have over the last thirty or so years mysteriously vanished. I was never given their names—we do not use names—but in the course of studies have made various assumptions; were I to write the names down here, many of you would recognise them.

At any rate, I spent my first twenty years in a cluster of buildings where these men worked and lived—I have no idea where it is located; an island—and my training and study was extensive. Then I was released into the world. My final instructions were two-fold: 1) Act on my own initiative and, 2) Maintain contact. Twenty of us went out; three were left.

Among the things I'd found out on a previous assignment, quite by chance, was that the donors of sperm

and ova which had led to my existence had subsequently got together, again quite by chance, and much to the consternation of the group that nurtured me, contracted for marriage, and produced a son. He had a Ph.D. in philosophy and, if our information was correct—this may come as a shock, considering the social theories you were taught at school—was effectively running the government. He was 26, liberal, brilliant and, as far as he knew, an only child. Which made the advantage mine.

That the proudest product of a group of pacifists should be waiting with an illegal weapon in an alley somewhere in this united world, this world at peace, to kill or be killed, may strike some of you—those who watch the regular broadcasts and read the newsheets—as strange, even unbelievable.

Such is life. And such, also (I thought, waiting there), is death.

**T**HE MOON was out as I crossed the dock that night which now seems so long ago towards a certain bar in a certain city in a certain country. I thought for some reason of Ingmar Bergman, how he had always used the moon as a symbol of the supernatural, and of an unsettling old poem called "The Listener" ("Tell them I kept my promise. Tell them I came."), and had a sudden sense of foreboding, though I am not, by nature or inclination, a superstitious man.

To explain what I was doing there, let me go back to those final orders. "Act on my own initiative"—that was what I did most of the time; no problems. But the second, "Maintain contact," was somewhat more difficult. No reports were made, nothing was



written down, and telephones, of course, even if numbers existed, were strictly forbidden; I had never used one. Dial an exchange and *two* relays open: one leads you into AT&T's network, the other into the government's computer banks. And even if you stay on audio, the sophistication of voiceprints being what it is—they are as individual as fingerprints—you can see the problem; sooner or later, the computer analysis sections would start spitting out questions and statistics we'd just as soon they not have.

So. I am a free agent, but, *randomly*, I am expected to be at certain designated places at certain designated times. I had been at one of those places, never mind where, that morning and had received a signal, never mind what, and now I was on my way to that certain bar, etc.

I took the usual precautions—I don't exist, *we* don't exist, but you never know; some of our actions had naturally attracted government attention, and indications were that suspicion was high: they knew something was going on, even if they had no idea what—went in, and took a seat by the door. The waitress came over. I order a Scotch.

"Will that be cash or credit, Sir?"

Credit of course meant the central computer banks; it was some indication of the sort of place it was that she even bothered to ask.

"Cash. Marks be okay?"

"Certainly, Sir."

She went off to get my drink and I sat looking at the faces around me. They were about what you'd expect. Mixed nationalities, shapes, expressions, none of them too curious about the others.

I had been there an hour—for me, that's two drinks—when a drunk staggered in and sat at the end of the

bar. I didn't show any interest, but that was my man. I'd never seen him before, of course.

For the next hour or so he sat there slugging down bourbon. People came and went. He was paying with drachmas.

Finally he laid his head down on the bar and seemed to go to sleep. The waitress had just turned from getting him a new drink. She sat it down and moved towards the phone. I took my time getting up, walked to the bar, and signalled for her attention. She took her hand away from the phone and came over.

"Dr. John Svensk. I'm a psychiatrist. Do me a favor, let me handle this. And get us some coffee."

She hesitated—it was against the rules—but psychiatry, after all, is in this day and age an authority that few dare to challenge. There was a real Dr. Svensk, license and all, of course, if she cared to check. Credit records even showed he'd been at this bar in the past, though God knows why. She went through a double door to the kitchen and I made a show of rousing the drunk.

"Gotta help me, man," he said when I got his head up off the bar. "Been askin all day. Everybody. Who won the series, man? I gotta know."

"Tokyo," I said. His head bobbed like a balloon on the end of a piece of string. "I'm Dr. Svensk. You want to come over here and talk about it? The waitress is bringing us some coffee."

He let himself be led to a table on unsure legs—a table far away from the others—and we sat down. The waitress was there with the coffee. She poured us each a cup.

"You'll want it black," she said.

"Right. Thanks." I gave her a ten-shilling note. "Keep the change."

We sat there for several minutes,

sipping at the hot, bitter coffee. Eventually he began to speak. I won't put it all down here—most of it was gibberish, non sequitur, signal and code—but the gist was this:

Secret negotiations were being conducted for a Sino-Arab "security pact," a pact in direct violation of the SALT talks then under discussion in Geneva. My employers (for lack of a better word) felt this to be some pretty fancy, and dangerous, footwork, especially as both sets of negotiations were being conducted by the same man, and they felt it was time to teach the government a summary lesson. They were willing to go all the way with this one, even if it meant blowing the cover of our entire organisation (which was, after all, quite unlikely). My instructions were to, first, do everything I could to embarrass the countries involved and, second, most important, arrange for the—well, loosely translated, "disappearance"—of that government official. Then there was something else, something about—

I sensed it before I heard it: the scraping of chair legs. I don't know, maybe it was something I saw in my contact's face, or the instinct that will always tie us to our animal forebears. But I was on my feet in a second. Even before I turned, I saw the gun appear in my contact's hand. That was strictly against procedure and without precedent—if they hauled him in, after all, they just have drunk citizen—and I realised then that his orders were absolute: protect me at all costs.

"Get the hell out of here!" he hissed as those thoughts were running through my head. "Go!"

I finished my turn and saw two men—whom I hadn't seen come in, and I'm careful about things like

that—advancing slowly towards us. I was out the door before they took three more steps.

Outside, I kept going. I didn't pause to wonder what was going on back there. He was doing his job, whoever he was, and I was doing mine, which was, at this moment, to put as much distance between myself and the bar as possible. I knew where I was going; it's almost a reflex; never enter without making plans for exit.

I came to a stop under a deserted pier and stood there a moment, forcing myself to deep-breathe. Conjecture flooded my mind. Who the hell were they? how did they happen to be there? how much did they know? Then I realised I could chase that around all night and still come up empty. My next contact was two weeks away; until then, I was on my own. With an assignment, no information, and someone, *someone*, hot on my tail. Well, at least that wouldn't last long. And maybe in two weeks I would come up with some answers.

I changed into the clothes I'd left there earlier, then peeled off the plastic make-up I always wear—there was no doubt that pictures had been taken. I threw it into the deep, dark mother of us all, the sea.

And walked casually away from there.

**T**WO WEEKS LATER I was somewhere off the Gulf Coast. The engines were shut down, I was drifting, and, the radar informed me, there was no other ship within fifty miles. But certain signals had been passed, and I was expecting company.

I was sitting below deck, a beer in my hand, thinking.

Those two weeks had been busy ones. Travel is difficult—after all, one cannot pay cash for an airline ticket

to, say, Vietnam, Arkansas, without attracting attention—but there are ways, ways of which I had taken full advantage.

For instance, what if I told you there is a nexus in a cow pasture in a certain Southern city, another in a certain European city, and four others the locations of which I do not know, where one may tap the central computer banks, even, with the proper code sequence, gain access to security information, and with no record of the tap?

Well, I *am* telling you. And if you wonder how such is possible, let me just say that a certain computer scientist who won a Nobel Prize in '78 later disappeared off the face of the earth. Now, if you were that scientist, called upon to head the central computer project, if you were a pacifist deeply concerned with certain current trends in international affairs and were, in fact, considering options which had been suggested to you, what would you do?

So a part of my itinerary had included that certain Southern city. I had flown into New Orleans, rented a car, and driven to another city not too distant, where I extracted a large amount of cash from a locker in a bus terminal. Then I had abandoned the car, rented another, and driven to a third city, where, at a health spa locker, I picked up a machine that has no name but is about the size of a shoebox (it even looks like a shoebox). At which time I was on my way to that cow pasture.

Now, I don't care what the hot-shot cyberneticists tell you—and some of them these days will tell you some pretty strange stuff—a computer cannot think. To get answers, you have to ask the right questions.

After reaching the nexus (no mean

feat: rather like negotiating a minefield) and patching in the shoebox (which requires the equivalent of a degree in engineering: there are thousands of wires, every color known to man, and you have to get the right ones), I ran the usual checks, entered one of the identity codes we use, and spent the next thirteen hours soliciting information. I fed in everything I could think of—names of my employers, names I'd assumed in the past, locations where we suspected seventeen of us had been killed, actions we'd taken in the past—and came up blank.

Oh, I elicited quite a lot of random information, some of it passably interesting; but nothing substantial.

There was no record in any security or open file concerning our organisation, my own existence, nothing. Not even a hint of real suspicion.

I cycled the shoebox through erase and promptly left the area, taking an entirely different route than the one by which I'd approached.

So there I was, sitting below deck with a beer I kept forgetting to drink, thinking. And waiting.

*Someone*, damn it, was onto us, and there was organisation behind it. How else to explain their intercepting that rendezvous, something we had believed impossible? Not only were they suspicious, they had information, closely guarded information: they not only were there, at the contact location, they were very definitely after *me*. A man who didn't exist, anywhere. If they weren't the police, or government men—and there was nothing in the files—just who the hell *were* they? "Foreign agents" (as they used to say in the old days before world unity and the denial that such existed), with their own secret, illegal computer banks to which we had no

access? And more importantly, whoever they were, just how much did they really know?

I was hoping to get some answers anytime now. Of course, it was possible that they knew about this contact too. But if my contact had any such indication, the rendezvous would not be made. And out here, miles from shore, radars on, we were fairly safe. As safe as we ever are.

I finished the beer and tossed the aluminum can down the reclamation chute. A moment later, a blip appeared on the radar, which was scanning at fifty miles. I sat still, watching the blip ease towards the middle of the screen. It was bearing in from the northeast; I had no idea of its point of origin. Nothing else showed. I waited.

A few seconds later, the radio, set to a certain frequency, crackled meaningfully. But if they knew everything else, they could know that as well. I made no response. My contact, it if was my contact, might read that as a warning and abort, or he might decide to come on in with the proper sequence; it depended on his orders and personal initiative. I was betting on the latter, since he had nothing to lose. As far as any observer was concerned, this was a dead ship, drifting. But if it was them, the others, they would definitely come on in. I didn't know what their orders might be. They might include bombing the ship out of the water and tying up the flotsam in neat packages. But if it was information they were after, they'd want me alive, and would follow the proper sequence (assuming they knew it) to make contact. I just had no way of knowing.

All I could do was wait.

Eventually, I could hear the ship cutting its way through the water to-

wards me. Then, minutes later, a bullhorn voice:

"*Rubber Duck*, this is Captain Ramsey. Is there anyone aboard?"

So far, so good.

"I repeat: Is there anyone aboard? I am requesting permission to board. Please respond."

Minutes passed like reluctant sheep. Finally, the whine of the engines told me they were laying in alongside. I felt a gentle bump as the ships connected and, almost immediately, footsteps up on deck. A single man.

In three minutes *someone* was coming down that ladder. The question being, How could I be sure it was my contact? Everything had been according to the book, true. Still. . . .

My hand tightened on the tiny relay box. It was set to ignite multiple, strategically placed *plastique* charges which would destroy both ships and leave precious little evidence they ever existed. I saw feet on the top rung. A body slowly followed. The face came last, when he turned around.

I sat there staring.

"Something wrong, Son?" He finally said.

"No, Sir." I set the relay box on the table before me. "Just a little surprised." Surprised, hell. This broke every rule we had.

He stood, looking me over carefully.

"How have you been, Son?"

"Fine, Sir."

He nodded thoughtfully.

"Good, good. I suppose you know there are only three of you left?"

I nodded. "Yes, Sir, I have received that information."

"And that one is insane?"

"No, Sir."

"I see. Well, no matter. I don't

suppose you'd have a drink on this tub."

"Yes, Sir. Bourbon and water, if I remember correctly."

"Right."

I stepped into the narrow galley and mixed the drink, brought it back. I had got myself another beer. We sat there sipping. I glanced at the radar. Nothing.

"I suppose you are wondering why I am here," he said after a while.

"Well. . . ."

"In breach of all security."

"Yes, Sir."

He took a long breath, let it out.

"It's grave, Son, quite grave."

He paused, inviting comment. When none came, he went on. "It could mean, unless prompt action is taken, the end of everything we stand for, and the final consolidation of corrupt establishments."

He paused again.

"Now, as you know, we do not flatter ourselves; we know we are nothing more than wasp stings, the burr beneath the saddle, the itch that must be scratched. But in this society within which we find ourselves, such irritants are essential. They go some small way toward maintaining equilibrium, integrity, and true peace. Those are the premises upon which we were founded, and upon which we have for many years now operated."

He stopped, obviously choosing his words carefully.

"Did you know that open warfare exists in the Far East? and that a revolution is building in United South Brazil?"

"No, Sir."

"No. No, of course not."

He finished his drink and held out the glass. I returned to the galley, mixed another, came back. He took a sip and said abruptly:

"Someone is onto us."

I nodded. "That seemed obvious at the last contact."

"Quite." He looked down at the drink in his hand as if the ice cubes were really icebergs, only the bare, innocent top showing. I had the feeling this conversation was the same.

"You will perhaps be relieved to learn," he continued, "that your contact was not molested. Or perhaps not. It signifies that you, as you surely must realise, are the primary target."

"That seemed equally obvious."

"I suppose."

He supposed. Here was a man who had dedicated his very life to logic and the pursuit of reason, disciplines he himself had drilled into me again and again, and now he was supposing. That worried me a little. It should have worried me a lot.

"Son. . . ?" He hesitated.

"Yes, Sir?" I finally said.

"May I ask how you feel about . . . us?"

"Sir, I think you know the answer to that. I am devoted to your cause. I feel towards you as a child feels towards his parents."

"Children, given sufficient cause, have learned to hate their parents."

"And what, Sir, would be the cause?"

"Perhaps the oldest, strongest cause in the world, the prime directive built into every gene you posses: self-preservation."

"Death is a thing one learns to live with."

"A mere slogan. Intended to short-circuit the processes of original thought."

"No, Sir. Zen."

"Philosophy is the only field of endeavor which produces more slogans than politics."

I looked at him carefully. I realised suddenly what was going on. And wondered why it took so long.

"I am not afraid to die, Sir, if it is necessary. If the cell must die in order that the organism flourish, that is the way of things."

"No, that is *not* the way of things. That is only what you were taught." He looked back at the ice cubes, a silent consultation. "You've heard Rimbaud."

"Of course."

"Everything we are taught is false."

"Sir, I do not feel it necessary to remind you, you of all people, that I am a creature possessed of free will, considerable personal resources—"

"And a carefully programmed set of psychological attitudes, virtual reflexes."

I shrugged. "Yes, Sir."

We sat there for several minutes. A blip showed momentarily on the radar, then moved off to the north.

"It has come to our attention," he said at last, "that, against directives, you have been the recipient of certain information concerning . . ." He sipped at his drink. "You know, of course, to what I refer?"

I nodded. "My brother. It was by chance, not intention."

"We are your family, Son."

"Yes, Sir."

He paused.

"You are under assignment, and I presume you have begun the preliminaries necessary to that assignment. Is that correct?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Feeling the threat to our cause to be of primary importance, we are now rescinding, at least partially, those orders. Your sole and only assignment is to remove that threat, at any cost, by whatever means are possible. These

orders are absolute. Are there any questions?"

"No, Sir." I knew now naturally, where we were headed; but what he wanted me to know, he would tell me, in his own way and time.

"We do not know who is behind this. As you have no doubt discovered, there is nothing of import in any computer banks to which we have access. However, our current information strongly suggests that the key man in this operation is . . . your 'brother,' as you insist upon calling him." He was watching me closely. "That is the sum of our information. It is not much, true, but we feel it sufficient to act upon."

He waited, then leaned forward in his chair. Body language, it's called, and at his instruction, I'm something of an authority. The feeling of trust and confidentiality was almost tangible.

"So here it is," he said. "At a certain specified time tonight, a certain unidentifiable body will be shot to death attempting to breach the security of your brother's office. This body will, in size and build, correspond with yours. They have, of course, no record of your facial aspect. We hope they, whoever they are, will believe this to be you. At some unspecified time after that, their attention diverted and, we hope, their suspicions allayed, you yourself will enter that same office, by whatever means you contrive. Is that clear?"

I nodded. I didn't imagine they had unlimited access to unidentifiable bodies. That other body, the sacrifice, had to be the other remaining . . . operative (they had never given us titles).

"At which time," he said, "you will execute your assignment. Which is, as I have said, absolute. Are there any

questions?"

I shook my head. It seemed clear enough. They were going all the way with this one, and I, as usual, was along for the ride. All the way down the tunnel to the deep, dark end. But without us. . . .

"I have one final word of advice," he said, interrupting my thoughts.

"Yes, Sir?"

"Read Heidegger."

"Heidegger."

"Quite. Your brother is a scholar, a convert to this very particular brand of phenomenology. This scholarship has affected his mind, his patterns of thought. To really understand him, to get inside his head, you must—"

"Read Heidegger."

"Heidegger. In the German. That's all I have for you."

"Yes, Sir. Understood."

"Good." He stood, placing the half-filled glass on the table before me. Need I say. . . ." He stopped. Maybe he felt enough precedents had been broken today. "That's all I have for you," he repeated.

"Yes, Sir."

He made his way to the ladder, climbed, and, moments later, the ship's engines revved up, pulled away. I sat listening to them fade into the distance. I was thinking: Doppler effect, red shift. But, deeper, I was thinking other things.

I was fully aware that I had just been subjected to a subtle, penetrating psychological interview; one does not send out a top psychocyberneticist (some, including himself, thought he was the best) to issue assignments, against all established procedure and precedent.

I was also thinking of kamikaze pilots; of an organisation that, ostensibly to protect itself, was willing to destroy itself, or at least cut off its one

remaining arm, of that prime directive, self-preservation. I had no delusions of self-grandeur; I was unique, true (though not as unique as my mentors, obviously, would have liked), but I was, and had been from the first, a pawn, expendable. But if a pawn reached the final rank. . . .

I stopped myself in mid-thought. One measures a circle, beginning anywhere. I had my assignment.

I was expected to drift, dead, for two more hours. Then I would head into a certain marina, dock the ship, and disappear.

My next contact was three days off. I had no illusions about being there.

I remembered a certain Jesuit, a man with whom I had spent a great deal of time, the man who taught me the game of chess, a grandmaster. I played him for ten years and never won a game. Then one day, having read quite a lot about Paul Morphy (who, if I have my facts right, eventually drowned himself in a bathtub), I began making sacrifice plays, gambits. My opponent grew increasingly, as I watched, disturbed, distracted—this was evidently against something deep within him—and I won the game. And every game we played thereafter.

I shrugged and cracked open another beer.

For the moment, that was my place, as they used to say, in the scheme of things.

**I** READ Heidegger. *Sein und Zeit*. Well, most of it, maybe four hundred pages.

It was a run-down hotel in the busiest part of town. Once, it had probably been a luxury establishment, but time, as it always does, had taken its toll. Now the paint was peeling off the walls, the ceiling above me sagged ominously, and the mattress

bore reminders of all those who had paused here, briefly or longer, on their cruise towards death. Stains of urine, blood, vomit, whiskey, semen.

I put down the book, suddenly realising that I'd become more interested in the metaphysics of the room than the same of Herr Heidegger. A note on the back of the jacket stated that Heidegger had lived for forty years on a mountaintop in Germany, which I could believe, and had quietly passed away one night in his sleep, a gentle smile on his lips, to join the great *Sein* in the sky; his work had dramatically altered the directions of Western philosophy, turning it away from the logical positivism current before his influence was truly felt; scholars and scientists of which had been the reading of selections from his own work.

Brief thoughts of Holderlin (his suicide), Nietzsche (that last, mad letter: "Sing me a new song. The world is transfigured and the heavens are full of joy. Signed, The Crucified.").

I don't know why I found the room of such interest. I was engaged in patterns of thought wholly alien to me, true—a man of action, I was not one to ponder overmuch the mysteries of life, to wade the sludge of everyday life towards the box deep in the jungle where The Secret was kept—and maybe the room was a reference point, perspective, bringing me back to the realities (or what I assumed to be realities) of what I was and the ways in which I had spent my life.

*Spent my life*—the phrase suddenly incurred a new, an absolute meaning for me, waiting there in that room to do (as I thought) what had to be done.

Urine, blood, vomit, whiskey, semen.

Maybe they were in the wrong or-

der, but that about summed it up.

I looked at the clock, which, like almost every clock in the world, was patched into the central computers, precise to the second:

11:23:45.

I swung my legs off the bed and stood. I generally travel light, but this time I'd picked up some extra equipment, some very special equipment, all of it illegal as hell. Most was already in place including some simple explosives (diversion is the oldest tactic in the books) and some extremely sophisticated electronic and bio-thermal devices. The rest, including a tiny gun the size of a cigarette package, I stuffed into various pockets.

And hit the streets.

Down the tunnel, as I had thought earlier, to the deep, dark end.

I had found a chink, an opening, and I was going in, going in blind with no real plan for getting out. But then, I didn't expect to get out.

I figured I had, at the outside, fifteen minutes to reach ground zero, fifth floor, second door, fifteen minutes before the delaying devices I'd set for midnight were detected by the computer checks, or some alarm I didn't know about was set off, or something—I really didn't know what was in there. But I was counting on those fifteen minutes, and if I got them, reached that office, my part of the game was over.

In more ways than one.

I reached the building and stood across the street from the entrance I'd chosen.

It was 11:58:59.

There were two guards on the door. They might be wearing life bracelets—that was a chance I had to take—but I was hoping the excitement earlier that evening had lowered their guard.

Crossing the street, I knew it hadn't.

What they saw: A certain People's Advocate, whose build is, incidentally, similar to mine, crossing the street, presumably for an unplanned conference with—someone.

What I saw: Two highly trained men coming to attention, one of them turning to the Combox by the door, the other reaching towards the government issue PPK at his belt. Standard procedure.

What the hell, I had no choice.

I shot them.

The float guard wouldn't be around for thirty minutes, and it was too late now to stop. I was, as of this moment, on borrowed time. I only hoped I was right about the fifteen minutes.

I entered the building and, without pause, shot the guard at the lobby desk. He was, as far as *human* security went, the nerve center. If one of the other guards had anything to report within the next few minutes, they would know something was wrong and an alarm would go out. That was just another chance I had to take.

It occurred to me that the chances were multiplying at an alarming rate.

I glanced briefly at the bank of scanners, saw all guards at their posts and no signal lights.

So far, so good.

My movements over the ensuing minutes are of no great importance, involving though they did the shooting of three more guards. Enough to say: I hit the stairs and kept going, damn the torpedoes, come hell or high water, and I didn't wait till I saw the whites of their eyes.

I came up short, breathing hard, at the second door, fifth floor. I had been in the building thirteen minutes.

The door was unmarked.

I eased it open and stepped inside. This was it.

The room was dark. He was sitting far back in the shadows, behind a huge desk, watching the door.

I raised the gun. I held it out before me, two-handed, levelled it at his head—

And stopped.

I still don't know why. I had never killed a quiescent, waiting man; there had always been some final move, of defense, at least escape; maybe that was it. Or maybe it was something deeper, a genetic code. Or maybe, even then, I knew.

"You would be making a grave mistake," the quiet voice came. "Congratulations are in order, I suppose. That you made it this far. Of course, I suspected that you would."

I said nothing.

"Upon opening that door, you broke a simple electrical connection, which is at this moment causing an alarm light to flash at various locations in and around this building. There are also heat sensors in this room, no doubt registering your intrusion. And of course I have closed a contact switch set into my desk here."

I let the gun fall to my side.

"At our last Security drill, it took the guards from the floor above, three minutes to reach this office. Which leaves you, I should say, approximately *two* minutes."

I hesitated. I knew there was no way out, no way in hell, but the instinct was still there.

"Please look on the table beside you."

I looked down. A piece of paper lay there, several words printed on it in a careful block hand: "Go out the door. Turn left and go into the next office. There is a door at the rear. Use the

identity code Sansom 12-B-56. Go through that door and keep going. Ask no questions."

I looked back up.

It was a trap; I was sure of that; but I didn't understand.

Still, it was the only game in town, the instinct was strong, and he who hesitates, etc.

I turned and fled.

The door was there. I used the identity code and went through it, coming into a long, bare corridor that sloped sharply down. Then stairs, more corridor, stairs again, corridor. There was no indication of pursuit.

An hour later I emerged in a copse of bushes in what I assumed to be a park. I moved away from the opening, into the cover of the bushes, and lay prone, the gun braced before me.

It took them four minutes.

The first one came up out of the opening like a rabbit, gun ready, and I shot him in the head.

There was a pause—the gun was silent, but they may have heard his grunt, or the impact of his body hitting the ground—then the other two came up together. I shot the closer one, rolled out of the way of the other's shot, then took him through the chest. He fell, breath gurgling. He wasn't dead, but soon would be.

I waited.

Thirty minutes.

Then I put the gun away and walked out of the bushes, looking for landmarks. I didn't know where I was, and I didn't like that; it put me at a disadvantage. It was not a city I knew well, except by map; I had taken pains in the past to avoid it and its mania for security.

I found what looked like a bridle path and followed it to the edge of the part, which was a small one, where I came onto a street I knew. I

walked slowly along it, turned right, walked two blocks, turned left, and kept on, improvising, following a random, crazy-quilt design all my own.

With the curfew, there were very few people on the streets at this hour. I saw three cars (one of them a police car on the avenue ahead; I tensed; it went by), two pedestrians. Of course if I were stopped and challenged. . . .

My destination was supposed to be a STOL pad near the center of the city, but I was moving steadily away from that. Everyone seemed to be three steps ahead of me; I didn't understand the game any longer; I had a sudden feeling of compassion for that Jesuit I'd shaken up by putting the game on terms he couldn't accept. I knew just how he felt. I had never been so confused, or felt so *alone*, in all my life.

It took me almost two hours to pick him up.

He was good, no doubt about it. In daytime, I'd never have tumbled to him. But he was hampered by the very curfew intended to make things easier for his kind. He was dogging me about four blocks back, moving up closer when I turned, dropping back on the long stretches.

I made several consecutive turns and, twenty minutes later, knew there was more than one.

They were running a modified ABC, which is the best tail ever devised and, on non-deserted streets, foolproof. Here, it stood out like a sore thumb.

I made some simple diversionary moves, then some more complicated ones, and they were still there. In fact, they were closing in. I couldn't tell how many there were. But probably enough.

Two things occurred to me.

First, they didn't care that I knew

they were there. Second, they had me.

No subways to duck into, no busy stores.

It was just a matter of time.

The only thing I couldn't understand was why they were holding back.

Then, suddenly, it came to me, as I mentally retraced my course: I was being subtly, surely maneuvered away from the building I'd left, as far away as possible, towards Hell's Row. In Hell's Row, one more body would cause no interest, attract no attention. And any investigation would be, at best, perfunctory.

I was seized with a new, profound admiration for the men there behind me, and for the intelligence—presumably my brother's—that guided them. I—all of us—had been outwitted, outmaneuvered, at every turn, from the start of the game. All the chips were theirs.

And I was in the final, foul corner.

Urine, blood, vomit, whiskey, semen.

The end of the tunnel.

"Low profile," as they used to say, had always been the rule—attract no attention, leave nothing behind—and it was a premise upon which, every day, every year of my life, I had operated. But as I stopped there, listening to the footsteps behind me, something broke. I could almost feel synapses, new synapses, firing inside my head.

I was going down, I had no doubt about that, but I was going down fighting.

I was going to leave something behind.

Evidence that I, name or no name, had been on this earth.

A memory.

Something.

I suddenly turned right, then right again, heading back towards the central city, moving fast. I was hoping they would believe what I was doing to be random efforts at elusion. I did not know how long it would take them to catch on—I didn't think it would be very long—but I was playing for time.

I had apparently run out of time.

Because I rounded another corner and one of them was there, waiting. Apparently he had anticipated my moves and, when I turned right, turned left, double-timing it to get here before me. Score another one for the bad guys.

But he had made a mistake: he had come in too close. I went in, fast, under the gun—feeling the bullet tear through the air just above me—and hit him square in the stomach. He had seen it coming; he just had too much faith in the damned gun, and too little time. We both went down, the difference being that I was ready for it and he wasn't. I was back on my feet in an instant. I kicked him in the balls and shot him in the head. I saw his face disappear. Then I was gone, a block away, two blocks, running.

For a moment I thought I'd lost them. Hope springs eternal and all that. But then I realised that the man I'd left dead back there had not been the only one to anticipate my movements. Crossing a street, I caught glimpse of them, I didn't know how many, closing in rapidly from my right.

I knew they had me. *They* knew they had me.

So now was the time.

There was an alley to my left.

Death's Row.

**S**O I SAT far back in the darkness of the alley, my feet braced against

whatever I could find, which happened to be a Dempster Dumpster and a brick wall, knees up and the gun out before me in the best two-handed grip, arms on my knees, and waited.

Bits and pieces of Heidegger kept floating to the front of my mind. Now, a man who is about to die does not ordinarily think of Heidegger—he may think of all the unfulfilled yearnings never to be realised, or if he is a different kind of man, a very lucky man, the few moments of real happiness he has achieved—but he does not think of Heidegger. I knew then that my picture of the world, like it or not, and I didn't particularly like it, had been changed, changed forever—was it Heidegger? was it the man in the still room?—cut to jigsaw pieces and scattered to the winds. A revelation, born of dire circumstance, that I would take to the grave.

Then (as the seconds became hours) I thought of the second directive: procreation. The continuation of the species and, by extension, oneself. I was aware for the first time, truly aware, that I was not the issue of that directive, that instinct, but of Science. Logic and Reason, the new gods. And I was also aware, painfully aware, that never in my life had I slept with another human being.

There were six of them. Shapes, not faces. I was not sure that I could fire at faces. But they appeared at the corner, came down the alley in wing formation. Shapes.

Prime directive time.

I figured I had three, four of them before they reached me.

My grip tightened on the tiny gun.

It happened very fast. All I saw was a flash of light, a single flash of light which seemed to come from the rooftop. But at the same time I saw six

men fall. I know what dead men look like.

I looked up and saw him coming down the fire escape. His back was to me. "You may put your gun away," the quiet voice said as he reached the bottom and turned.

I got up and moved towards him.

We met in the center of the alley, the bodies around us.

We stood there, I don't know how long, looking at one another.

"Nature and nurture, Brother," he finally said. "Composed of the same genetic material, still we are different. You, the proudest product of pacifism, are a violent man, a killer. Whereas I—"

"We are to overlook, I take it, the fact that you have just shot down six of what I presume to be your own men."

He smiled. "So perhaps we are not so dissimilar after all?"

He held up a small object. "Quite a useful toy. It seeks out the body heat, within a limited range of course. Quite illegal, naturally. But the newest thing. And useful."

"Six men are dead—"

"Six of the best agents this country has produced. And the only six remaining, incidentally, who knew of your existence." He held up a hand. "The exigencies of circumstance."

I had a sudden sense of revelation, of impending *epiphany*, as James Joyce, that Jesuit's favorite writer, had put it.

"Care to tell me what this is all about?" I said after a while.

"You are to be congratulated on your intrepidity," he said. "Of course, I had counted on that very thing, to bring you this far."

I just stood there, watching him. It was like looking in a mirror. The face, the hair, the build, it was all the

same. A genetic freak, even if the hotshots tell you there *are* no genetic freaks. We were identical. Twins.

"It goes back a long way," he said. "Back to an only child's fantasy—Did you know there were three of us?"

I shook my head.

"We have a sister. She is insane."

Waiting, I said nothing.

"An only child's fantasy," he continued a moment later. "Perhaps to be expected. But it persisted, in the face of all reason, all psychiatric care. I imagined I had a brother, a companion. 'Mon semblable...mon frere.' It was a thing that issued from the deepest recesses of my soul. A fantasy, true, the projection of a lonely child—my, *our*, parents had their careers and little time for me—and I knew it to be a fantasy. But I would not let go."

He paused. I said nothing.

"October 21, it was my birthday, quite late at night. I had had a bad dream and had gone to my parents' room. The door was closed. But through it, I could hear them discussing their participation in certain genetic experiments; it appeared that my father had contributed sperm to a sperm bank, my mother released the products of her womb to another group. *They* did not make the connection; *I* did. And from that night, my fantasy became a certainty. Yielded to reason—reason, and intuition. Of which there is a great deal within the genes we share."

I nodded. I had always assumed it to be one of the intangibles they aimed for. Intuition, at any rate, had carried me safely through many bad times. It was an old, trusted friend.

"From that night forward, my life has been as surely guided as has yours, towards the single purpose of contacting you. I realised that I must,

to achieve this end, gain a position of power, and of some autonomy, and I geared my life to that goal. As I slowly rose in the ranks of government, new information became accessible, information which confirmed by suspicions. Scientists thought to have defected, bodies found burned beyond recognition in wrecked cars, anonymous actions against various powers—I followed the elusive thread of logic through it all, through this welter of random information, unrelated facts. Until one day last August—never mind the specific details; it was a warm, beautiful day—it all gelled. I knew what I was up against."

He held up a finger. "Logic." Another. "Intuition." Then:

"The primary urge was emotional: simply to contact you. But as the years went by, as I carried out my duties, learning more and more about the world we live in, and surmising more and more about your activities, things accumulated, things that I needed to say to you, tell you. Things you didn't know."

He looked deeply into my eyes.

"You are a machine. Do you know that?"

I shrugged. Do machines shrug?

"An antique. A dinosaur. But a dinosaur capable of greatness."

He looked off towards the mouth of the alley, glanced at his watch.

"Finally, I gathered about me, by means available to me at last, seven men, seven top-flight agents, requesting absolute security. No reports, nothing in the central computers, no records of any kind—you have no idea how difficult this was—and I sent out, again by means available to me at last, the information that I was running the government, knowing that, by whatever circuitous process, it

would eventually reach you."

He paused again.

"Consider my problem. I could not compromise my position, a position I felt essential to the very continuity of the world. And I could not come to you. Even your own people cannot reach you. I had to force you to come to me. So I set the process in motion, and waited."

Again, the watch.

"Tonight, as I knew you would, you came. But my office is, of course, bugged, and I could not talk."

"So you sent your men to kill me."

He seemed surprised that I could, after so long, still speak.

"They would have been suspicious otherwise. And I had no doubts about your capabilities."

I nodded. I was a machine.

"I sent them out knowing that you would elude them till the last possible moment, while in the meantime I made certain arrangements, very complex arrangements, to absent myself without questions being asked—I am, of course, under constant surveillance—and meet you here."

He glanced again towards the mouth of the alley.

"I don't know how long I can safely stay away. The arrangements are ingenious, but . . ."

He waved his hand.

"Questions *will* be asked. Those men, for example. But I have prepared myself for the questions; for, I believe, every eventuality. I will survive. As, I suspect, will you."

"So you penetrated the organisation, left yourself open, drew me out, almost got me killed, risked everything to come here—you still haven't told me why."

"I thought I had."

I shook my head and waited. Some players never bring their queen out

till the last possible moment. And I never felt safe as long as that queen was out of play, sitting there, ready to spring into action.

He hesitated, choosing his words carefully. He had always chosen his words carefully; you knew that, listening to him.

"As you yourself pointed out, we are not so dissimilar."

The quiet was deep, profound.

"You had a . . . teacher. A man fond of Rimbaud."

I nodded.

"*Je suis un autre.*"

I had heard that before.

"*The other.* Existentialism italicised it, made it Evil. . . ."

He paused.

"It's curious, something I've only recently come to appreciate, but all philosophy, and there are thousands upon thousands of books to attest to it, all philosophy deals with a few, a very few, quite simple, but still irreconcilable, questions."

He waited.

"Irreconcilable because they are opposites. Our foundation in Aristotle; everything must be A or non-A. The question of free will or predetermination, good and evil, the spiritual or physical (or the essence and the existence)—"

He looked again at his watch.

"And then, of course, there is the recurring question of means and ends. Unlike the others, they are not always opposite. A violent man dies violently, an eye for an eye, we are not surprised. Or he *may* die quietly in bed, violence long since past. . . ."

"What are you saying?"

"I am saying that, while opposite, we are yet alike. We aspire to the same end. I, by intelligence and intuition; you, by violence. Your conditioning—"

I am a creature possessed of free will, with considerable personal resources—”

I stopped. It took me back to that morning—well, really yesterday morning—and a boat off the Gulf Coast. A *Slogan*. A conditioned reflex.

Again, he waited.

“The . . . organisation you . . . work for—”

We had no name for ourselves; there was no reason *he* should.

“—It is the product of things which no longer exist. The world has changed. You, individually and collectively, by your very existence and actions, endanger the very things towards which you have strived.”

Now I waited. I wasn’t sure. I knew I wouldn’t *be* sure. Not for a long time.

*The other.*

Bits and pieces of Heidegger.

“You are asking me to go against everything we stand for,” I said.

“No. I am asking you to be a man, a free man. Unbounded by slogan and prejudice. . . .” He smiled, the second time. “That’s all I have for you,” he finally said. “That’s all I had to say. I trust your intelligence to guide you henceforth. It is an intelligence in which, like my own, and for obvious reasons, I have a great deal of trust.”

He started down the alley.

“Just a minute,” I said.

He stopped, half turned.

“What would Heidegger say about all this?”

He shrugged.

“Who knows? The exigency of circumstance, the desperate acts of desperate men—those are not withing his purview. He dwells in the realm of purest thought. As, once, did I.”

I looked down at the bodies.

“Must be nice,” I said.

He looked down at the bodies.

“Yes. It is. But not for us. The times in which we live—”

He shrugged again and continued down the alley.

I watched him go, the other, wondering what the future held. For him, for me.

For all of us.

I SAT in a small room, facing a man I knew as well as I knew any man alive. Others sat close by.

There is an emergency signal, never used, not *meant* to be used, but provided nonetheless. After two months underground, I had emerged, at a certain place, a certain time. I had made the signal and confirmed it, setting into force a complex chain of circumstance that finally brought me here. To this room. Home base.

One measures a circle. . . .

“I want out,” I said.

“I see.” There was a construction on the desk before him. Pieces of an erector set brought randomly together; I would later remember it. “Would you care to say why?”

“Man is the animal that cries—”

“Yes.”

“—Or laughs.”

“So some would have it.”

“I have done neither.”

I waited. The faces watched me closely. Also waiting.

“I don’t feel any further explanation to be necessary,” I finally said.

“I see.” He reached out and touched the construction. It trembled, shaky, uncertain. “Would it make any difference if I told you that we know everything?”

I said nothing. The sense of revelation was new to me, but recognisable.

“You carry within you a tiny transmitter, surgically implanted in the mastoid bone behind your left ear when you were two years old. What

# Not the lowest low tar...



just  
the best  
tasting.

Today's Kent. The easy switch to low tar.

Kent Kings: 12 mg. "tar," 1.0 mg. nicotine;  
Kent 100's: 14 mg. "tar," 1.1 mg. nicotine av.  
per cigarette by FTC Method

Warning: The Surgeon General Has Determined  
That Cigarette Smoking Is Dangerous to Your Health.

A

# Newport



*Alive with  
pleasure!*



Warning: The Surgeon General Has Determined  
That Cigarette Smoking Is Dangerous to Your Health.

*you hear, we hear.*

As we all, I thought, carry within us the seeds of our own destruction. It explained a great many things. I thought of what my brother had said: A machine. An intelligence machine, a killing machine.

"I want it out," I said.

"Yes. Yes, of course." He took his hand away from the construction, from all transitory things. "It is to be expected, of course, that sooner or later the child will rebel against its parents."

"I love you all," I said quietly.

"Yes. Well." I knew that this was as difficult for him, for all of them, as for me. "Freedom is your birthright. The birthright of every man. We have fought, and were conceived, to guarantee it to others. We can hardly deny it to you."

The others nodded.

No one spoke for several minutes.

I felt the sadness building inside me, a slow death. I thought again of the second directive. The continuation of the species. . . . I was the last.

"Will you come with me?" he said after a moment.

We went out of the small, quiet room and down a lengthy corridor, the two of us, towards, I soon realised, the medical complex.

We stopped before a bank of curtained windows.

"I thought, before you left," he said, and rapped on the glass, "that you should like to meet—" (the curtains swept aside) "—your new family. Your brothers and sisters."

I looked down into the bassinets. There were twelve of them, perfect and lovely as only babies can be.

"Or perhaps you would prefer to think of them—the sperm is yours—as sons and daughters."

Something was stirring deep within

me, something I had never known before. Pieces. Bits and pieces.

Perhaps it was just for a time. Find some answers. Come back.

Home.

"There are others, of course. Older. But for security reasons—"

He broke off and started down the hall again.

I followed.

*I was not alone.*

A room was waiting.

**T**WO DAYS LATER, I stood on the harbor.

I was waiting for someone, a lab technician I had been told, to finish smearing bacteria on agar, or whatever it was that lab techs did these days, and get me started on a journey that would eventually take me, everything quite proper, to the coast of New England. He was already ten minutes late.

They had removed the transmitter, of course, under general anesthetic; my head was yet bandaged. But they had done something else. They had built me an identity. (I hadn't known that was possible. "Oh, our capabilities have advanced almost geometrically," the computer technician had said when I asked him about it. Then he began to talk about tracer loops, open leads, recall potential, and I was lost.) Of course, the fingerprints wouldn't match—I had asked to retain my mobility—but the voiceprint would—a calculated risk—and it was all in the central computes.

So you see, it was not really me waiting there on the dock.

It was John Green. Citizen John Green.

A young man with blond hair, blue eyes, eventually came along the dock. He was dressed in jeans, a windbreaker. At the outside, he was

eighteen. Was this. . . . No, of course no. But it was a question that would recur to me again and again in the future parade of faces. No one had told me how many there were.

"Mr. Green?" he said. "Sorry I'm late."

It was the first time anyone had used the name.

"Yes," I said. "You my ticket out of here?"

"Right." The boy looked closely at me. "Haven't seen you around before. You new?"

"Right." The boy looked closely at me.

I didn't know the answer.

"No," I finally said. "I'm . . . not new."

"Oh." Comprehension dawned in his eyes. "Oh," he said again, and there was respect in his voice.

For this youth, really but little younger than myself, I was History. And History, though useless, was accorded respect.

We climbed into the boat and shoved off. After a while, I looked back.

At first, I thought it was raining.

I lifted a finger, touched it to the corner of my eye, took the finger away and looked.

They were tears.

Salt, like the very waters through which we passed.

I thought of the revelation born in that dark alley, my picture of the world, the jigsaw pieces, scattered to the winds.

"Herr Heidegger," I said softly to those same winds.

He was dead. I was alive.

"Herr Heidegger, I am crying."

The winds bore me no answer. I began to wonder if there *were* answers.

The small boat bore steadily out to sea, carrying me away from the past to—what?

I remembered the impression of being, for my young skipper, History. What did History *become*? what was its *Sein*?

Not the future.

Two things came to my mind then, two things whose source I was not to know for six years, blotting out all else.

The first was a phrase: *The sempiternal present*.

The second was a word. It shimmered in the closed, close space of my mind like St. Elmo's fire, that Captain Ahab quenched with his fist:

*Apotheosis*.

—JAMES SALLIS

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#### ON SALE IN FANTASTIC (Feb.)

THE PURSUIT OF THE UMBRELLA by MARVIN KAYE. A SENSE OF DISASTER by CHRISTOPHER ANVIL. THE BIRDS OF THE MOON by LISA TUTTLE. DAYS OF STONE by JACK DANN. TWO SORT-OF ADVENTURES by OVA HAMLET. THE LOSER AT SOLITAIRE by PAUL DAVID NOVITSKI. THE WIZARD OF DEATH by PAUL HALPINE. THE HUNTER by ROBERT ADAMS.

# GREEN THUMB

Herewith a vignette from the author of the Darkover series . . .

## MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY

A SPACESHIP grounded on an alien planet is worse than an old-fashioned windjammer becalmed on a windless ocean. The crewmen sit around all day and get on each other's nerves. And when, beyond the shuttered viewports, tall sinister aliens with claws and yellow eyes, like great intelligent tigers, are patrolling with drawn weapons, the atmosphere inside gets nerve-racking.

The bells rang, and Tom Stewart, apprentice in the "green room," turned from a rack of hydroponic tanks. All afternoon, checking tanks for mold and fungus, adding the tiny amounts of chemicals that made the plants grow, he had carried on as if the ship were out in space where it belonged. Even on this strange hostile world, with a green sun and tall catlike forms keeping them imprisoned inside, they had to eat. Science, which could do almost anything, couldn't make men enjoy living on a diet of vitamin pills.

Besides, the green leaved plants gave off oxygen, and purified the air of carbon dioxide. So the Hydroponics Expert wasn't exactly a nobody on the ship. But for some reason, people thought it was funny—that among all the mathematicians and engineers and navigators and experts, there should be an apprentice gardener whose business was tomatoes and pumpkins and lettuce and herbs for seasoning bland rations. And Tom himself—the only man aboard who couldn't plot a planetary orbit to save his life—seemed even funnier. He was always

good for a laugh—even when, like now, there wasn't much to laugh at.

Nervous men, penned up and in danger, have to laugh at something. Tom knew this, but it didn't help. He wished he could stay here, among the fresh green leaf-smells, but the day's ration of salad greens and herbs had been turned over to the cook, and there was nothing to do but go along to the wardroom.

He buttoned up his tunic, straightened his uniform cap, then turned back at a faint "Miaow!" and made a dash for the small, black, furry body enthusiastically rooting in one of the herb boxes. He grabbed the cat up.

"Hey, Stinker," he admonished, "you get that stuff *by ration*." But he picked an extra sprig of the fragrant stuff, watched the cat bat it around with wriggles of pleasure, then, the animal under one arm, left the green room and deposited the cat in the cook's quarters:

"Here, I found him in the plant room again."

The cook—he held four degrees in nutrition and chemical engineering—took the little creature. "Thanks, Greenthumb." Tom winced at the unwelcome nickname. "He sure likes that place." He scratched the cat's ears, and then deposited it in the storeroom. Chemical pesticides were forbidden in a closed-air system, which meant the cat was worth ninety times his weight in rations, keeping down stray mice or varmints.

"Any new experimental crops?

Tried planting those airborne seeds they got in the air samples here?" the cook asked. "Who knows, it might be good to flavor spaghetti. Or—" he chuckled, "maybe when we meet the turnip men from the stars, you can grow them some relatives."

In the wardroom, the officers and other apprentices were already gathered, and as Tom went to his place, the second officer looked up and growled "Hey, Greenthumb—you hate to grow so much garlic? It gets in the air system."

Tom said patiently "It's a better source of vitamin C, for its size, than any other vegetable." He took his seat next to his Chief, and said "Sir, the cook's—I mean, the Dietetic Engineer's cat was in the green room again."

The officer said morosely "I've got more on my mind than a few messed-up leaves. Maybe we ought to send Stinker out to negotiate with his big brothers outside—we're not getting anywhere." His grim face turned to the shuttered viewport, and every officer remembered the faces of he aliens; whiskered, feline, grim.

The Second Officer said, "Why can't they realize we mean them no harm? All we want is an opportunity to repair the hull shafts—but we have to do it outside the ship."

The Captain said, "The language engineers are working on their sounds, but we haven't gotten to first base." He snorted. "And everytime anyone puts his nose out, they drive us back in. We've offered gifts, everything—blast it, if we hang around much longer, we'll have to compute our whole course again to allow for star-drift." He put a fork in his food and scowled. "Hey, Greenthumb, why don't your tomatoes ever taste like the home-grown kind, or are you too busy chasing cats? Why

not go out and say 'Scat' to those—those overgrown pussycats out there?"

Tom went to check the hydroponics once more before bedtime: He opened a viewport shutter momentarily, looking out at the green sunset and the prowling, grey-furred forms; sighed, and went to repair the damage done by the scratching Stinker—crushed leaves, torn stems that gave off a bittersweet smell in the fresh green air. He stopped, the hair rising suddenly on his forearms, a wild surprise yeasting up in him. He bent to smell the herb.

Half an hour later, a boyish form slipped, in the darkness, from the unguarded space-lock. *They can probably see in the dark like—like cats*, he thought, quaking, *and they're big as tigers. If I'm wrong . . .* but he refused to think about that. He shrank as the huge feline forms, silent on padded feet, suddenly surrounded him, their yellow eyes gleaming. He held out his hand. . . .

"CAPTAIN," said Tom, appearing at the lock between his two grey-furred escorts, "They're ready to negotiate, so get your language engineers ready." The huge aliens purred agreement, their paws held out, weaponless, claws sheathed, in a peaceful gesture.

"But how did you do it, Greenthumb?" the Captain asked, later, as they listened to the sound of rivets and machines working on the damaged hull. "All our gifts—they just turned up their noses and sniffed!"

Tom chuckled softly. "They sniffed at this, too," he said. "Give Stinker the credit, because he's the one who'll go on short rations for a while. They're big cats—but they just loved his catnip!"

—MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY  
AMAZING

# A HIGH NEGATIVE CORRELATION

If you've recovered from Vol's "You've Come A Long Way, Baby" (May), you might want to try this one; it has, she says, "a pretty cheery ending, for me. Alas, I'm a dyed-in-the-dacron cynic . . ."

## VOL HALDEMAN

**D**R. WAGMAN looked me over sharply. He didn't like my suit, my wootz beads, my cherished self:

"We are—harrumph—gratified to have a colleague visit and tour our installation," the good doctor greeted me sourly. "Our laboratory has made numerous discoveries that have been virtually ignored. I believe you'll be very interested to see how our work is progressing."

I smiled free and easy at the old pundit. Frankly, I thought he'd been puttering around for years on the tail ends of renewable grants, but as a practitioner of the art I knew just what he needed from me. These old-style scientists—workhorses of the business, of course—demanded a response performance of kudos and plaudits. I spun it out.

"Overjoyed to visualize your seminal research by direct perception," I told him. "What happened to the ban on surveillance that was standard protocol for your industry?"

"That has been a problem in the past," Dr. Wagman said stiffly. "Some of our allegedly objective colleagues represented themselves as embarrassed or leery of our method because we use *Homo sapiens* as our subject. I have decided, however, to permit occasional observation of our procedures in order to promogulate our results."

I read that loud and clear; the man needed lucre. Well, he might have something useful to tell me. I could maybe scoop the profession on a whole new technique, a panacea of the mind. We were brothers under the skin. I needed lucre, too.

The white-coated savant fumbled ceremoniously with an antique collection of metal keys and finally succeeded in unlocking a door. He could've knocked; there was a lab flunkie not two feet inside, but he had to do his act. High ego strength. Anyway, it was the animal lab, people in cages, just like the buzz. The lab flunkie had something to say.

"Dr. Wagman, I think we can breed Snowball—er, #1059—today. The cervical smear tests high in glucose and is suggestive of fertility this morning." He had a nice delivery, straight out of a 1970's training film, just the right touch of obsequiousness. I like to see people who are good at their jobs. I winged a smile his way.

Wagman started to get all excited. He had to tell me all about it. "This subject is a simple schizophrenic," he said happily. "The crossmatch is with #1934, a strong catatonic schizophrenic. #1934 can become very antagonistic, belligerent, violent, especially if he senses excitement. It

throws him into a frenzy."

I expected the old boy to rub his hands in gleeful anticipation, but he restrained himself somehow. The lab flunkey went down the row. It filtered through to me that they were going to bring this bad dude to old Snowball here and I backed away. The old man was putting out quite a few watts of tizzy, enough to set the beast off maybe.

"Hey, uh, couldn't old Snowball meet this match on his own territory?"

"No, we've had some experiments ruined that way." Wagman shook his head. "The male is more likely to attack than breed if he's on his home ground. Or the female aborts. Anxiety can become a confounding variable that appears to alter the results of the genetic crossing, too."

I hung well back but they handled it okay. The bad dude was prodded along the line until he came to the open cage, then he ducked into it. The lab flunkey shut the door, locked it up tight. We all stood there and watched through the bars.

"Hey," I said judiciously, "where's the aberrant act? That stud's poking and fumbling just like my dumb cousin Ronnie. Sure he's schizzy?"

"Yes, you'll see the disruptions in his behavior. He cannot block out extraneous stimuli; everything hits him at once and with equal force. He'll become overwhelmed by sensations and strike out or withdraw. It'll take a good while to accomplish the breeding."

"Why bother?" The old man looked like I had ruffled his feathers. I altered my tone two points towards idolatry, kept on with my query. "I mean, why not take a leaf from *The Cattleman's Journal* and slip it to her in a syringe?"

Another thing occurred to me, apropos of my dumb cousin Ronnie. "Besides, schizzies persevere. Suppose he really gets into humping? How're you going to damp his pile, cramp his style?"

The old professor went into a lecture. "Harrumph! Psychoses are not, contrary to widespread belief, strictly a defective biochemical process. Nor are they simply a function of a faulty environment. No! We are convinced mental illness is a product of both factors. We can only identify the causes by carefully eliminating one factor at a time. We did try some crossmatches by artificial insemination but the resulting psychoses were disappointing. We found we needed that minor environmental influence or we would experience a decrease in the strength of the response. We returned to the natural breeding process."

Also more fun to watch, you old goat, I thought. But he was right about it taking a long time. The male had backed off and was holding his head in his hands. Snowball was patting his face and stroking his hair.

"What's she doing?"

"Nothing statistically significant. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov goodness-of-fit two sample test retains the null hypothesis. But come along here," Wagman invited. "I'll show you one of our first successes."

I cast one lingering glance back at old Snowball. For a lab critter, she was built pretty nice. When she hunkered down over that stud, I could see where she got her nickname.

My host led me down a corridor to an eye room. It had an old-fashioned one-way glass wall, but I guessed you had to make do with obsolete equipment out here in the boonies. I squinted, focused through it, grunted.

"This is an example of another

series of experiments. We are producing autistic children here. They're separated from their mothers at birth and raised in a specially programmed environment. It's unpredictale rather than entirely aversive, uncertain: deafening noises, withholding nourishment, rocking and shaking the cage, and so on. This little fellow is coming along fine."

"Feeh!" I replied. The subject in question was a tow-headed little boy about four years old. He was rocking rhythmically and sucking his thumb. The thumb was stripped bare of flesh, I could see the tendons and bones. He wasn't seeing anything through his open eyes. I itched to get my therapeutics on him, even though kiddie konsultations weren't my field.

Wagman looked satisfied. "His parents were both manic-depressives," he told me. "I think this crossmatch turned out very nicely."

I was beginning to get the drift. This was a man with a goal-object. Making crazies was his trip. No wonder he'd never let anyone in for a look-see; the APA would toss him out, banish his ass to a midwestern agricultural school and set him to psychoanalyzing the chickens. Still, on mature reflection, nuts were my business. If I could glim onto his protocol for production, maybe I could reverse the process and hatch a cure. Save mankind. Heal the sick. All that. I adjusted my mein accordingly.

"Well, sure," I agreed. "Chances are your research'll pin down the root causes of psychoses. When you know how to put a loony together, you'll know how to sort one out. Hens to Athens, you're doing a lot better at making them than my own exalted profession is doing at curing them."

I must have been a shade off on my connotations. The old boy turned dark

red and looked like he wanted to spit.

"These psychotics are a valuable resource for imagination and creativity," he sputtered. "I want to make more of them, not cure the few we have!"

The outburst twitched the lab animals. I could hear bars rattle on the cages behind us. Whines and snarls sounded too close for comfort. It messed the old man's mind not at all. He kept right on shouting at me.

"Look! Come here! I'll show you my most important project and then maybe you'll understand." He pulled me away.

"We've had a great deal of trouble with this. We took a colony of assorted pyschotics, not just garden-variety psychotics but good strong naturals, isolated them. We have a matched group of control animals in individual cages. I like correlation," he said abruptly. "It's such a useful statistic; it'll pull almost any research out of the dung heap, but this time, nothing. Chi Square, nothing."

I wasn't following his brainwork, but I followed his body further down the corridor.

"We provided this environment," he gestured, stopping at an observation port. I took a look. "It is suitable for simple food gathering and a mildly nomadic existence. These were our best, our most highly psychotic individuals. All ruined, all wasted! We expected they would show initiative, creativity, innovations, that they would produce a whole new exciting society with great surreal art and fantastic literature and new scientific inventions out of their unusual and exciting perceptions. Maybe even some novel ideas for conflict strategies, the government has some lovely money for war experimentation . . ."

The observation port was a magnifier. I thought I recognized my old

(cont. on page 81)

# THE MAN WHO WASN'T THERE

## WILLIAM F. TEMPLE

*William F. Temple, author of the classic Four-Sided Triangle, offers a short story about hypnotism and an experiment's unforeseen developments . . .*

Illustrated by JOE STATION

TREVOR looked as though he had died in his sleep many hours ago. He was as stiffly wooden as the Jacobean chair supporting him. His eyes were closed, his mouth open—in the o which so often shapes the last gasp.

Dale, who probably feared ridicule more than death, thought: Shaw will never get *me* looking like that.

This was Shaw's apartment. Everything in it except the telephone could conceivably have been touched by James the First. Shaw was very rich; therefore leisured. He had no wife and no problems except the perennial one: how to amuse oneself.

Amateur hypnotism was the current answer.

"He's now in deep trance," Shaw whispered. Then, annoyed by the lapse which proclaimed his inexperience, for Trevor couldn't be awoken except by command, he added loudly: "And ready to accept post-hypnotic suggestion."

Dale observed: "I'd always thought deep trance was a condition of complete relaxation. Trev looks more like a case of *rigor mortis*."

Shaw, who thought the same, said, still loudly: "It affects different persons in different ways."

And hoped it did.

He went on: "We had some fun with the last guy I did this to—Bill Benson. Know him?"

"The broker?"

"No, no—the pro golfer. I told him that when he woke up he'd be a chimpanzee. Everyone fed him peanuts. Laugh! And, boy, did he scratch for those fleas!"

Dale produced a smile as a tribute to the rich who could be cruel, vulgar, stupid—and useful. As a compensating tribute to good taste, he suggested: "Let's try something more subtle with Trev . . . Make him think I'm not here, not in the room."

"Could be amusing," Shaw conceded. "Okay, then. Now listen carefully, Trevor." He enjoyed this bit. It made him sound like a mastermind. By comparison, detailing his order to a waiter was plain ordinary: anyone could do that. "Our friend Dale has been called away. He's gone. You will wake up when I have counted to three. Exactly ten minutes after that, you will fall asleep again. During those ten minutes you will talk to me but not to Dale, because he is not here. Do you understand? Answer now."

Shaw's tones were authoritative and his frown was meant to be, but it betrayed some doubt.

The doubt was allayed. Trevor's lips moved, though not much.

"I understand." A toneless echo.

"Good." Shaw re-directed the frown at his gold wristwatch. "I shall now count to three. On the word 'three' you will wake up. One . . . Two . . . Three."

Trevor opened his eyes, gave a huge yawn which relaxed him, then looked around slowly identifying his surroundings.

"Pardon me. Guess I just dozed off. What were you saying, Shaw?"

"I said I'd hate to work for Cadman's."

"You'd hate to work for anybody," said Trevor. "Where's Dale?"

"That's the point. The Cadman lab phoned and wanted him in a hurry."

"Don't they ever let him off the hook, poor guy? Isn't he entitled to any private life? Why doesn't he get another job?"

Dale, looking on, smiled wryly. He had asked himself those questions often enough. He was a research physicist at Cadman's and they drove him hard. This was the first time in months he'd been a member of a threesome which wasn't discussing electronics.

Aloud, he said: "I'm open to offers, Trevor."

Trevor was a self-made, independent manufacturer of garbage disposal units. He ignored the suggestion and Dale with it. It seemed he hadn't heard it.

Shaw, mastermind, smiled a faint but complacent smile.

Dale tried again. "Can I get you another whiskey, Trevor?"

Trevor looked bewildered but not by Dale's query. He was staring at



the paneled oak door.

"I'm not over there, I'm right here, Trevor," said Dale and slipped an aside to Shaw: "Gosh, you've reformed him!"

Trevor was rising uncertainly to his feet, looking a bit white.

Shaw reflected the uncertainty. He was still a little scared about the unknown fringes of this hypnotism game. It was like electricity: you used it, not knowing what it was, and if you weren't careful things could go wrong.

He asked jerkily: "Anything the matter, Trevor?"

"That man over there. Do you know him?"

"What man? Where? I don't see anyone."

Trevor couldn't take his eyes off the man who wasn't there.

He pointed to a spot just inside the door. "There, for Pete's sake. He's looking at us."

Shaw glanced at Dale and shrugged.

He said: "Take it easy, Trev. Sit down and I'll fix you another drink."

Trevor put a hand to his mouth. "I'm sure he walked clean *through* that door," he whispered through his fingers. "Is it a ghost? Is this room haunted, Shaw?"

"Good heavens, no, man."

All the same, Shaw wondered briefly about that carved oak chest. The legend sold with it was that a priest once hid in it and suffocated there.

Dale said: "There's something odd here, Shaw. Trev can't see me. That worked, all right. But you've given him the illusion that he's seeing someone else. Ask him what the fellow looks like."

Shaw was glad to take direction now.

"What does this man look like, Trevor?"

But Trevor was absorbedly listening to the subject of the inquiry.

"I get you," he said presently. And then: "Yes, it makes sense."

"What—" began Shaw, but Trevor shushed him. "Let me hear this," he said.

Shaw shrugged again and reached for the decanter. He refilled Dale's crystal tumbler, then his own. He raised his glass. Pink light from a winter sun fallen low in the west ran and shone a moment in its handcut channels.

"To our unknown guest."

"May he remember to knock next time," Dale responded.

They sipped their drinks, waiting for the end of the strange communion.

Eighteen floors below the wide double-glazed windows, the folk of the twentieth century moved along the shadowed street to familiar goals, homebound or pleasure-bound, spellbound or muscle-bound.

Against the wall-space between the windows the grandfather clock stood calmly ticking their lives away. It was far into its third century of such office and men meant less than the comings and goings of so many furniture beetles.

Dale thought about that and shivered suddenly.

Shaw noticed and said: "Yes, there's a draft from under the door. I've told them about it and they still haven't fixed it."

At last, Trevor said. "Thanks for taking such trouble to explain, Malak. I'm glad to have made your acquaintance. Goodbye. Goodbye."

He made a farewell salute at nobody.

Shaw poured a whiskey and handed

it to him. "And now maybe you'll take the trouble to explain to us."

"To us?" Trevor's eyebrows lifted.

"To me," said Shaw, sidestepping complications.

Trevor took a mouthful, savoring it, swallowed it.

"Makat is a Plutonian. That's the short explanation."

Shaw did a double take, partly to amuse Dale, partly because he couldn't help it.

"Not his fault, poor devil," he said. "Me, I'm a Scorpio man—born lucky."

"Born ignorant," said Trevor. "Pluto's a planet—our outermost one, and frozen at that. Makat comes from it."

"Nice of him to drop in like that."

"Oh, he's here all of the time. Thousands of Plutonians are. It's their job to keep an eye on us."

"Why, what have we done?"

"Enough to worry them about what we might do next. Especially if we ever reached Pluto. They think we're hopelessly mad, you know."

"Do they, indeed? I suppose this one was just humoring you?"

"He wanted to learn why I could see him. Although they're moving among us every day, normally they're invisible to us. That's because they don't want us to know they exist."

Shaw winked his offside eye at Dale, then said: "That seems illogical to me, Trev. If they're invisible, we shouldn't know they existed, anyhow, whether they cared about it or not."

"The point is, Shaw, that they're not *really* invisible. They put all Earthmen under mass hypnosis long ago and suggested we couldn't see or hear them."

Dale exploded into laughter at the expression on Shaw's face.

"They beat you to it, old man."

Shaw grimaced and finished his drink.

"So Plutonians watch us because they think we're crazy and dangerous. But *they* aren't, of course. They merely walk through solid doors."

"If you knew half as much about physics as you do about nightclubs," said Trevor crushingly, "you'd be aware that nothing—no, nothing, not even your head—is solid. Pity Dale isn't here to explain why. Plutonians know all about interpenetrating fields of force. They know all about us too. They have to. That includes you and me personally, and Dale. For instance, they know that you practice hypnotism and that Dale's working on hysteria."

Dale laughed again. "Okay, Trev, that does it. You win. You can stop kidding us now. Shaw, you're a flop as a hypnotist. Your spell didn't take. The biters have been bit."

Shaw regarded Trevor uncertainly. He wasn't used to being taken for a ride. It had always been the other way around. An unfamiliar feeling called chagrin touched his self-possession. It wasn't pleasant. The warm womb of his world seemed to let in a cold, sudden, and disturbing draft. He was reminded that there were unpredictable people whose respect his money couldn't buy. Trevor was one. Death is another, added a mouthless voice in his head.

"Trevor—" Shaw broke off.

For Trevor had started visibly and was now looking towards the door again. He seemed to be listening. His eyes grew round with shock and his cheeks paled.

*That* wasn't acting. If Trevor were kidding anyone it was only Trevor. And he was doing it thoroughly. He had begun to tremble and his knee-joints were slackening.

He sank back into his chair.

"No, no," he protested with small force. "No, Malak—please."

Tears welled in his eyes.

"Hell, what have I done?" Shaw muttered, and went to him. "Trevor, what is it? What's wrong?"

Dale hovered around them, alert, watching, considering.

Trevor raised a distressed face to Shaw. He blinked. A tear trembled, then ran swiftly down to his jaw.

He said in a weak little voice: "Malak says he's sorry but I must die now."

"What?" Shaw gripped Trevor's shoulders. "Snap out of it, Trev. This is all nonsense, you know."

The cowed voice went on: "Malak's chief has been looking into it. He concludes that your hypnotic suggestion affecting my visual and auditory senses erased their earlier parallel suggestion. And so I have seen a Plutonian, and know Plutonians exist, and I could tell other Earthmen about them. And that must not be allowed to happen and therefore I must . . ."

The voice passed into a mere sighing sound as Trevor's eyes closed. His body became very still, as though it were made of wood—like the chair.

Shaw stared at him. "My God, is he really—?"

"No, he's not dead," said Dale. "Look at your watch."

Shaw looked. Precisely ten minutes had passed since he counted to three and awakened Trevor. Now he remembered.

"Of course," he said, with relief. "He's relapsed into trance, as per orders. Right on the dot, too. Whew! It had me worried, Dale. I didn't bargain for all that dream stuff to come floating up from his subconscious. Some fantasy, that."

"It sure was. If I might raise a

point—I was under the impression that hypnotized subjects remained completely unaware that they'd been hypnotized. Yet Trev knew that you had hypnotized him. Is that in the book?"

"Theoretically, no. First time it's happened to anyone that I know of. By the way, what was that thing he said you were working on?"

"Hysteresis," said Dale. "It's an effect of delayed magnetism. I'm studying a possible application . . . Good lord, I've never told a soul about it, not even at the lab."

Both men looked at each other and found no comment.

"This has gone far enough," Shaw decided. "I'll wake him now. Listen, Trevor, I'm going to count to three. On the word 'three' you will wake up. Do you understand?"

Trevor sat corpse-like and silent.

"Answer now," Shaw pressed.

No response of any kind.

"Trevor, can you hear me?"

No answer.

Dale put his hand on Trevor's forehead, frowned, then listened for his breathing. He began to look worried and laid two fingers on Trevor's wrist.

"All right?" Shaw's wish was father to the thought.

"Can't detect his pulse," said Dale, tightly. He unbuttoned Trevor's shirt and felt for his heart.

He withdrew his hand suddenly. "He's dead," he said.

Shaw couldn't or wouldn't believe it—until he checked. Then he was overcome. Dale poured him another whiskey. Shaw couldn't touch it.

Agitatedly, he asked: "Dale, do you think I'm responsible for this?"

"Of course not. It was a heart attack, I should think."

"Yes, but . . . Maybe it was

brought on by accepting the idea that he was going to die. Sort of . . . like witch-doctors . . ."

Shaw trailed off, confused, miserable.

"Well, if it were, you didn't give him the idea, so don't blame yourself. Lord knows where he got it from. Some self-induced hallucination, I suppose. He may have had a brain tumor—who knows? Look, have that drink. You'll feel better. Then I'll ring his doctor."

"Malak," said Shaw. "How did he invent a name like that?"

Dale shrugged. "Something remembered from science-fiction, perhaps. It's the hysteresis bit that puzzles me most. I guess it must have been telepathy. They say the tele-

A High Negative (cont. from page 75)  
psychology of personality instructor down there. He had a big love-hate thing for grandmotherly types, but not a shred of creativity in his perversions. No wonder Wagman wasn't getting results.

"Harrumph! They don't fight, they don't invent, they don't create. They live together quietly and peacably. I don't understand it," the old man said angrily.

I felt a spark of interest growing deep in my skullbone.

"Wait a minute," I said. "Hey! Your nuts down there are responding appropriately. Look at that! They're helping each other, caring for each other, demonstrating visible warmth and affection. Look, that man's got his arm around that woman and he isn't throwing her to the ground and raping her. There! That child interrupted those adults and didn't get stoned. Good lord, there's even an old person down there, must be sixty if he's a day, and they suffer him to live? Good Freud, man, what therapy did

**THE MAN WHO WASN'T THERE**

pathic faculty becomes more apparent if the subject's hypnotized, don't they?"

Shaw nodded absently. "Telepathy exists. Little doubt about it." He pondered, then added quietly: "Supposing Malak exists too?"

"That's hardly likely," said Dale, and tried to laugh. He made only a mirthless sound. There was nothing to laugh at.

"If he does," Shaw pursued, "he might consider that we know too much about Plutonians now. Just like Trevor. And then—"

There was a cold draft from the door. Both men felt it and looked that way.

—WILLIAM F. TEMPLE

you use? This is revolutionary! Tell, tell!"

"That's just it," Wagman said grumpily. "We just left them alone. We left them to get on as best they could. The incidence of psychotic behaviors should be phenomenal. Yet this group—our very best—is behaving normally. It's a dismal failure, a high negative correlation."

I grabbed the old fart by the lab coat. "You mean to tell me you did nothing to treat these subjects? No analysis? No client-centered therapy? No existentialism? Medication? Thorazine, electroshock, prefrontal lobotomy? Nothing? They've cured each other?"

"That is exactly the problem."

I composed myself with an effort. My entire career field would be worth so much bat-shit if this got out.

"I've got it," I said finally. "Change your criteria. What they're doing is definitely insane!"

—VOL HALDEMAN

# WHAT ARE FRIENDS FOR?

*With friends like these, the Thropo didn't need enemies . . . fortunately . . .*

EILEEN GUNN

Illustrated by RODAK

THE DAY the new thropo hits Pomona, me and the guys lay a cher-ry bomb on him, just to show we're glad he came.

Then when he comes down from the palm tree (heyzus, can those snakeheads jump), we tell him it's a, uh, local custom.

"Most hospitable," he says. "Must show you a few of our customs some day." The tentacles where his head should be are wriggling like crazy. He looks like a clothespin wearing a nest of snakes, and he sounds like a muc-ken 3V announcer.

He sits down next to us on the curb and starts asking what we do, where we live, all the old jakweb.

We got a couple hours to kill before we hit the condo we been casing, so we scag him around a while. I say I test birth control shots. Chico says he's an assistant breather for DivAir-Qual. You know.

The thropo swallows everything. Doesn't blink an eye. (And he's got a few extra eyes to blink.) His tentacles quiet down while he listens. After a while the joke bennies and we burn it. Then we just sit around for a couple minutes and look at each other. Finally the thropo gets up and he shakes himself off like a dog and

he says, "Well, you young people seem to have a very high collective imagination index. Just the sort of thing I've been looking for. Have a pleasant afternoon." Then he walks off.

Later on, after we finish the job (which goes off smooth as high grade hash), we catch him down to Paco's store on the corner. He's over by the magazine rack, checking out the skin-nies, taking notes on a little pocket corder. I don't get what he's saying, but he looks pretty worked up for a snakehead.

Allie pokes me in the back. "Hey," she says, "you think they go for that kind of stuff? I thought they laid eggs or something."

"I dunno," I say. Maybe he's just finding out what he's missing."

"We ought to get old Margie on his ass," says Chico. "She'd teach him a thing or two."

"Shit," says Allie, "even Margie wouldn't do it with a snakehead."

Then he sees us, and all his little tentacles wave. We kind of look at each other. Then we figure what the hell and go over. "A must unusual concept," says the thropo as we get closer. "Portraying the distribution of genetic information in a social context

to stimulate the economy."

We look at each other again. "You want stimulating, you should see the live shows down on South Garey," says Allie.

"That would be most instructive," says the thropo. "Perhaps you would all like to accompany me?"

"Shit, man," says Chico, "it costs ten bucks to get in."

"My discretionary fund was intended for such contingencies," says the thropo. We just look at him, and he says, "My treat."

So pretty soon we're sitting in the Pink Flamenco on South Garey, around these tables with bug candles on them, and I'm thinking that this is a pretty screwy thing to be doing, going to a skinshow with a snakehead. The other thropos, they come sniffing around, ask you a few questions, and you give them all the wrong answers. After a while they go away, whether we fool them or not.

But fuck 'em, I say, with their questions and their clinics and their rules and regulations. Sign up here, look over there, pee into this, cough, and let's have a sample of your blood. I don't see where that gets anybody. And it was the same with the government, before the invasion. I mean, a lot of people were really racked out when the snakeheads took over, and a lot of other people said it was a good thing, but to me it's all politics, and whether it's snakeheads or shitheads don't make much difference. So when they send their thropos around asking a lot of dumbass questions like a bunch of snakey little missionaries, I like to give them a hard time. And I don't really understand what I'm doing at the old Flamenco with the new thropo, if you see what I mean.

Just as I'm thinking all this, the



show starts. The same tired old farts doing the same tired old numbers they was doing when me and Allie used to sneak in as kids. So we're whistling and yelling and throwing condoms and popcorn at the stage. Then I look over at the thropo, who is sitting next to me, and see that he's taking notes again on his corder.

"What do you use all that stuff for anyway," I say.

"Well," says the thropo, "most of it goes straight into the central processor for reduction and comparative analysis. Be used later in your species evaluation."

"Oh," I say. The double-jointed brother-and-sister act is on stage now, so I return my attention to the show. The thropo goes on snuffling into his corder.

When the DJs are through, I start wondering what the thropo means. Our species evaluation? "What species evaluation?" I say.

"Evaluation by our population control board," he says. "Individuals selected will be transferred to an unoccupied planet. More than enough to go around—hardly seems worth renovating this one."

I am for the moment speechless.

But the thropo's not. "You and your friends have, if I may say so, an excellent chance of being transferred, for your genetic variety ratings are good, your collective imagination score is high, and you demonstrate ability to survive in the face of a hostile environment." He waves his tentacles to include the Flamenco, the valley, the whole state of Los Angeles. "The wealthier castes, I'm afraid, are less adaptable. Deprive them of bodyguards, and they wouldn't last an hour on the streets."

My voice returns. "What happens to the people who stay here?"

"Not my department," says the thropo. "Assume they'll be scrapped with the planet. Can't allow them to continue breeding like this, cause trouble in no time."

The double-jointed twins are back, but I'm not in the mood. "Whose idea is this, anyway?"

"Oh," says the thropo, "it's standard procedure. All the new planets are stabilized at a healthful population level where proper aesthetic conditions can be maintained. Never any trouble after that."

No, I think, there wouldn't be.

"When's all this get underway?" I ask.

The thropo shrugs his back and all his tentacles ripple. "Doing the best we can," he says. "Genetic studies have been completed, of course, but the evaluation process can't start until the anthropological studies are ready. Afraid you could be here another week."

"A week? Shit, man, that don't give us much time to pack." I am thinking I don't mind being among the chosen few, but I am not sure so sure I want to be trucked off to some other planet. I mean, I was in Michigan once, and once was enough. But I figure there's nothing I can do about it right now, so I decide to relax and glom the show.

"Ain't that blonde a whiff?" I say to the thropo, just to be friendly.

"Marvelous, simply marvelous," says the thropo. "A shame that such things must come to an end, but then, as one of your poets has put it so beautifully—"

"What come to an end?" I say. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"Oh, there will be programs recorded on holotape in the museums. No need to worry that it will all be completely lost."

"Completely lost?" I say, beginning to sound like a looped holotape myself. "What will be completely lost?"

"Nothing, as I say," says the thropo. "But naturally, after the conversion process, this sort of thing will no longer be commercially feasible. It's to be expected that there will be some changes in the economic milieu as a result of the migration. But this is such an unusual approach to peripheral economic stimulation—an entire industry devoted to depicting the mechanics of evolution and species survival, millions of people dependent upon it for their livelihood, you understand—that I think it's worth recording, if only as a galactic cultural curiosity. One of my little projects this trip."

I start off at the place where I got lost. "What conversion process?"

"The neuterization process," he says. "Don't want your new planet to turn into a grossly overpopulated mess like this one. Our genetically-tailored recombinant replacement process yields all the benefits of Type III distribution, and it's really much more reliable than the cumbersome organic method."

I get just about every other word, but I get the drift. "Neuter?" I say. "You're not going to fucking neuter me."

"Ah," says the thropo. "English semantic structure can sometimes be most confusing."

I am about to tell him what he can do with his confusion, but I figure I should cruise if a bit. "This, uh, neuterization process," I say, "uh, how'd you say it works?" Meantime I'm thinking maybe I should watch the show more carefully, because in a little while I might not be interested in this sort of thing at all.

"Automatic," says the thropo. "Just

wonderful, the equipment we have now. When I first started out, we had to do it all by hand, you know."

"No, no," I say. "I mean, do you, you know, *cut* anything? Or is it, uh—"

"Ah," he says. "Nothing like that. Just a spot of directed radiation and of course a psychic implant. Inhibits the libido and prevents wasteful energy loss."

This new angle makes it pretty difficult for me to just sit and watch the show, let me tell you. I mean, who wants to be turned into a zombie and sent off to some weird planet? But those snakeheads, there's no fooling around with them. The thropos, they don't give you any trouble, but you don't mess with their cops. Those people who fought the snakeheads really got fried.

After the show, we ditch the thropo and I tell the guys what he says. This causes some surprise, as you can imagine. The first question is, how come he told it to me, when nobody else seems to have heard about it. Now, I can't really answer that, except maybe other people know and they're not telling. But I convince the guys that what I'm telling them is true. I don't lie to the guys, they know that.

Everybody agrees that life on this new planet, whatever it's like, would be a hustle and a half compared to life on Pomona. This is despite the fact, which you may not know, that it's tough to make a living as a nixen these days. Most of the greeners are pretty dumb, but they got these fucken defense systems you need a goddam degree in engineering to get past.

We figure we're going to have to do something fast. But we don't know what.

SO THE NEXT DAY we've got a lookout for the thropo and we catch him standing in line to see a triple feature at the magnafox, a bunch of Japanese spleebies with titles like "Sex Sluts From Beyond the Universe." He's got his holocorder with him.

We mumble him a little, then we lead him around to what we want to know.

"Who's in charge of this neuterization program, anyway?" I ask, real casual.

"In this sector?" says the thropo. "I am. And I can tell you, it's not a job that leaves me much time for field research."

I don't have much sympathy for his troubles, but I am very happy to learn that we know the guy in charge. The thropo, however, doesn't stop there.

"The subtleties of your reproduction ritual and the multiplicity of commercial media depicting its forms leave me with little hope of observing all types of socio-sexual economic interaction first hand." The thropo waves a tentacle or two at the theater billboard, which is a full-color holoposter of this blonde whiff who is wearing antennas on her head and very little else, being threatened by an ugly-looking monster with a huge dick. When you move, the monster leers and shakes his dick. "When one considers," says the thropo, the interpolation of additional thematic content, such as the exploitation of your species' regrettable xenophobia, the amount of material is simply overwhelming."

I am beginning to see some possibilities. "You need time, huh?" I say. "This isn't something you can do after we move to this new planet?"

"The social context is most important, says the thropo. "Of course, we

are assembling great collections of source material—films, photos, printed matter, ritual clothing and devices. But after neuterization, the social context will be lost forever. The other day, for instance, when you and your friends were participating in the performance, tossing objects to the performers and interacting with them, I noticed that many of the other people there, the older men especially, were most introspective. I want to examine that sort of reaction as well, but I simply can't be everywhere at once."

The line is getting closer to the door, and I can see that if I don't get the thropo away, I'm going to lose him entirely. So I talk the thropo into skipping the spleebie for now and joining us in a bar across the street. This bar is the pits, hot and dark, with air that's been resyked so many times it has garlic on its breath. But I figure at least the thropo will buy the servesa, so it won't be a total loss, even if he doesn't buy my line.

We all cram in around a dirty little table in the corner and I start my rap. "You need time, huh?" I say. "You're the Man, how come you don't just make time?"

"So many planets," says the thropo. "So much material to collect. If I thought the subject important enough, I'd stay here a while, research it more thoroughly. Someday, perhaps, I may wish I had. Difficult to judge."

"If you stay here," I say, "will you still be sending people to that other planet?"

"Certainly not," says the thropo. "Need everyone here. No meaningful research can be done with the tenants of a planet's population. But I see little justification for staying. Nothing that would convince my

superiors, at any rate."

"There's lots of stuff," I say, "that you haven't seen at all. You just hit the shelves, man. There's stuff behind the counter, too, you know. And nobody'd show it to a thropo." I look over to Chico, who I know I can count on to get things right the first time. "Chico," I say, "run down and get some UC zines from Paco. Rubber, S-and-M, chickens, watersports, whatever you can find." I look back at the thropo. "You'll see lots you never seen before."

While we're waiting for Chico, I want to keep the thropo busy, so I ask him what he gets off on most.

"Oh, all of it fascinates me," he says. "Just the thought, for one thing, that humans would be interested in watching the mating ritual, when survival theory indicates they should be more interested in participating. How does a watcher maintain its genetic strain in competition with those who exchange germ plasm more readily?" He looks around at us, as if he thinks we can answer this. "In addition," he says, "there's the use of this voyeuristic tendency, however it's inherited, as a means of generating employment. Not only the people who produce this material, but their suppliers, distributors, those who sell them office and living space, these people all benefit. It's a very valuable service. If there were no demand for it, there would be millions more starving." He goes on like this for a while, and I am hatching out what I'm going to do when Chico comes back. I figure I will continue to play it by ear, because the thropo seems pretty good at selling himself on whatever he wants to buy.

Finally Chico turns up, and he's got a good bunch of zines with him. The thropo is high as Jamaica.

"Most unusual material," he says,

and he's muttering other stuff to himself in sort of a snuffle. "Here, for instance, the subjugation of violence to the purposes of procreation." He flips through another stack. "A paradoxical denial of the generative religious cult to further the process of generation." I don't know where Paco sells all this stuff showing people dressed like nuns, but somebody must buy it. "And these magazines seem to specialize in the use of devices that—" He goes on and on.

"So what's the word?" I say. "You think we're worth studying a little longer?"

The thropo looks up. "Yes," he says. "I feel quite confident that my superiors would approve a few decades of intensive research. Perhaps more, dependent on the results."

"So you'll be around for quite a while," I say. Another idea is getting to me. "You could probably use some help. Me and Allie here, and Tom and Rita and Chico and LaVerne, we'll be glad to show you where the *real* action is. We don't charge much." I figure we won't have it too hard, getting paid to find the thropo some action. And I am keeping in mind that business has been lousy lately, like I said.

The thropo gets all choked up. "I don't know how to show my appreciation for all this," he says. "It could be the making of my reputation. The preservation of cultural treasures like these and the retention of their social context. And they could so easily have been destroyed with your planet."

"Relax," I say. "We're your friends, right? What are friends for if they can't help you out once in a while?" By this time the thropo is almost crying, if snakeheads can cry. He falls all over us with his snakey thanks and pays for the beers, like I thought.

—EILEEN GUNN

**WHAT ARE FRIENDS FOR?**

*Our Associate Editor Emeritus returns with the story which answers the question—*

# **WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO WHEN YOU SEE YOUR LADY STROLLING ON THE DECK OF THE STARSHIP? GRANT CARRINGTON**

**Illustrated by RICHARD OLSEN**

THE STARSHIP orbited the Earth. It was being constructed around the shell of an asteroid whose orbit had neared that of the Earth and had been captured by a team of astronauts. It had been building for ten years, an ungainly collection of pods and experimental sections that would carry seven thousand gypsies beyond the sun, beyond Pluto, beyond the comet-spawning zone that marked the borders of the solar system, gathering speed as it gulped hydrogen ions, sailing toward light-speed. It would take two years to get past Pluto's orbit, most of its crew in cryogenic sleep, reaching out in an attempt to lengthen the lifetime of humanity beyond that of its own solar system, a

feeble attempt at immortality for Mankind.

Less than one percent of the population had volunteered for its crew and passenger list, but it had taken several years for the computers to sift through that small percentage of mankind's billions, trying to attain a balance between races, skills, intelligence, physical abilities, education, and a myriad of other criteria.

Even so, some people had to be actively recruited, people whose talents were rare and needed.

Primrose Young was not one of those. She had been in love with the project from its inception, when she was still halfway through grammar school, a little flower of a ten-year-old

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girl. She had grown up with one thought in mind: she was going to be on the crew of the starship. She had studied all the disciplines that she thought would be needed: chemistry, cybernetics, astronautics, nuclear physics, computer science. She was certain that her talents would cause her to be chosen for the crew.

But she was only one of tens of thousands who had the same idea and dream, who had grown up pointing themselves arrowlike at the starship. Only a mere handful, slightly less than a hundred, of those tens of thousands, would be chosen.

Philip Steinbrunner could have cared less. He knew about the starship, of course, but it was of no importance to him. His world was the theatre; it was his universe, and he had no need to go out into the galaxy. Nightly, behind his bottle-thick eyeglasses, he orchestrated the live performances of the city theatre, his stubby fingers passing glibly over the keys of the computer terminal. The electrical impulses so generated became multiplied a thousandfold inside the computer, channeled and redirected, flowing to lights and machines, slowly bringing set pieces in and out, fading lights slowly or bringing on instant black-outs, creating sunsets complete with robin songs. If he could have controlled the actors, he would have done that too, and with consummate precision, perhaps even art. But Philip did not consider himself an artist: he was merely a craftsman, a technician. Those in the trade knew of his skills and ability; the actors knew he was good, but they dismissed him since he was not an actor; the public assumed that the success and brilliance of the theatre were completely the responsibility of the director and the actors. Philip



Steinbrunner knew all this and he didn't care. All that mattered to him was the creation of precision and the exponential performance curve that would never quite bring him to perfection.

Where Philip Steinbrunner was thick fingers, pear-shaped body, a fringe of scanty reddish-blond whiskers, and deceptive clumsiness, Primrose Young was all curves and grace. She was a lithe dainty girl with delicate breasts and gentle, well-curved legs. Her face was squarish, firm, and dedicated; it should not have gone well with that delicate body, but somehow it worked. She was not pretty or beautiful, but she attracted plenty of men. She would have looked even better if her dark hair had been long and flowing, but she kept it cropped short, almost mannish, to keep it out of the way of her experiments. For Primrose Young was just as adept in the laboratory as Philip Steinbrunner was in the theatre. Her delicate tapered fingers flew across laboratory consoles in a dance that was as graceful as Philip's was earthbound. She could find reagents and crucibles and solve four-body problems and Korbshev polynomials as easily as he faded lights and rearranged sets.

They should never have known each other. By all the rules that govern such things, they should never have even met. He was Caliban to her Miranda. Their worlds were Venn diagrams that should not have ever intersected, but they had one point in common. The name of that point was Linda Fortino. She was a casual friend of Primrose's and a friend of a friend of Philip's. Somehow they both got invited to the same party at Linda's.

Primrose arrived first. As usual, she

was one of the first to arrive at the party. Linda Fortino's current lover, an engineering student, had just assembled his own light organ and he delighted in showing the instrument off. He let other people try to create their own light shows with it, but no one came close to doing as well as Primrose. Not even Linda's lover himself could do as well as Primrose.

After several people had played with the instrument, she sat down at the console and began hitting keys at random, learning what effects they would cause, finding the blue lights, the green lights, the strobes, the amoebas, the slides, the flashers. She learned to regulate the timings, to slow down and speed up, and when she was finished, she accepted the congratulations with aplomb and casual amusement. After all, she knew she was as good with a computer as they come, better than anyone else she knew.

So when Philip shambled in and was urged to try out the light show, she smiled to herself. This clumsy male in the ill-fitting clothes could not even do as well as most of the others. She wondered why they urged him to try it, and she felt a moment of pity for him and once again thanked her stars that she was so talented and lucky.

She was a little surprised when he obtained simple but tasteful patterns by his slow tentative approach to the computer. Despite his clumsiness and shyness and awkwardness with people, he seemed to have a flare for creation.

"Not bad," she said condescendingly, to no one in particular.

"Wait," someone close to her said.

She turned around in irritation, but couldn't figure out who had said it.

Already the show was gaining in

complexity, gathering momentum for a fireworks display of green carnations and violent nebulae. It was not the cold, cool, calculated precision light-play of the competent computer-player. There was such an element present, but there was more. A dark gray of depressions that rapidly shaded through purples and reds into a brilliant orange crescendo of happiness ran over the walls. The orange chased the gray around the room, devoured it, even as the orange itself was being devoured by the cool green of contemplation. The contemplation disintegrated in a shower of bright blue and yellow streamers, culminating in protons and falling stars, gamma rays and starships, streaking fleshtones, rich brown planets orbiting white stars, mountain lions and Irish whiskeys, prophets on the mountains and feather headbands. With a final burst of color, Philip settled down to a leaf storm that danced in autumns around the room, quiet and gentle.

There would have been applause had anyone known that he was finished, but Philip was in his element. Having explored the machine and pushed it to its limits (which were far beyond those its creator had thought possible), he now worked gently and unobtrusively with the music. People drifted off, to dance, drink, talk, make love, or just watch his patterns.

Primrose, now utterly crushed, knowing that Philip had surpassed her smug but sterile production as easily as she had surpassed the others at the party, watched him as he played at the light organ, totally immersed and absorbed.

"Care for a sniff?" someone asked her.

She shook her head, turned away,

and went looking for Linda Fortino. When she found her hostess, she asked, "Who is that weird-looking guy at the computer? He's good."

"Oh, he's a friend of Jerry's. Has something to do with the theatre. Jerry's a dancer, you know. He's really playing up a storm, isn't he?"

Primrose nodded. She didn't know who Jerry was and she didn't much care. She walked back to the light organ and stood behind Philip, watching as his clumsy blunt fingers moved skillfully over the keyboard. It was hard to believe that such awkward and apparently random movement could produce such beauty.

Philip looked up at her and smiled briefly. She smiled back, but he was already re-absorbed in his show. Half a minute later, aware that she was still watching him, he recorded a simple twenty-five-instruction loop, put the organ on automatic, and turned back to Primrose.

"You like it?" he asked, smiling like a child.

"It's very good. Could you teach me to do that?"

He frowned. "I don't know," he said. "I'm not very good at teaching people things."

"Just try," she said, sitting down beside him.

From there, things progressed as such things progress, in great leaps and clumsy bounds, looping back upon themselves and getting caught in the capstans. Primrose got Philip to agree to let her come over to the theatre, where he showed off his skill at setting up scenes and changing lights. He let her run the computer, more complicated in its way than those of the laboratory. Whereas she was used to the delicacy of control necessary in the laboratory, she was not accustomed to the complexity of

operation, the number of degrees of movement and ability necessary for the theatre. Philip watched over her like a mother hen, ready to pounce if she should put his precious equipment in danger.

She stood behind him while he ran an actual production, and she watched as the actors and actresses left with barely a word for him.

"They don't even know you exist," she said. "They take you for granted."

"I'm just part of the machinery," he said, grinning as though it was the most natural thing in the world.

"But that's not right. If it wasn't for you, they couldn't do anything."

"It's unimportant," he said, reaching up to switch off the computer. The faint electrical sound that had become a part of them all for several hours died with a barely perceptible whimper. "You appreciate what I'm doing, and I know when I've done a good job. What do they matter? They're just actors." It was a long speech for Philip and he grinned in embarrassment.

That was the first night that Primrose slept with him. The first of many. Philip didn't live for others' approbation; he lived to satisfy only himself, and yet he did so without imposing his will or presence on others. As long as they left him alone to do what he wanted to do, he was happy. It was a refreshing change from the tense competitiveness with which Primrose had grown up.

They walked into the electric park together one night when the theatre was dark. Philip hadn't wanted to; he wanted to go back to the theatre and explore the computer still more. There was a scene in the current production he wasn't satisfied with. He felt a slight change in one of the sets could result in a smoother transition.

"Not tonight, Philip," she said. "It can wait, can't it?"

"Sure," he said, "but there's nothing more important that needs to be done, so why not do it now?"

"Can't we spend tonight together alone for once?"

"We'll be alone in the theatre."

But Philip had little experience withstanding someone else's desires and so he went with her. She found a section that was dark, checked the time, and pointed to the sky. "Look up, Philip. You'll be able to see it pretty soon."

They watched in silence for a few moments then the ship appeared magically in the sky. Hidden in Earth's shadow, it hadn't caught sunlight until it was almost at the zenith. Now it moved rapidly across the sky, twinkling and fading as its rotation reflected sunlight from different facets.

"What do you think?" she asked when it was gone.

"It was nice," Philip said.

"Nice? Is that all you can say about it? It's the hope of mankind."

"Well, I was just thinking . . ." Philip's voice trailed off, but Primrose said nothing. She had become accustomed to his thoughtful pauses by now and knew better than to interrupt his train of thinking. "If we moved a couple of those stars, and maybe put a little more color in the twinkling of the starship . . ."

"Moved the stars?" Primrose asked incredulously.

"Yeah," Philip said eagerly, "you know, and maybe a little more wind in the trees." He clapped his hands together. "Don't you think that would be more effective?"

"Philip, Philip," she said, like a mother to a little child. "This is reality. We can't do things like that."

Philip looked thoughtfully up at the

sky, his chin cupped in one hand. "Yeah," he said at last, "but I can do it in the theatre."

SHE TOOK HIM to the laboratory with her one day and let him play with her computer, watching him as he had watched her in the theatre, but he made no mistakes. He did exactly what she told him to do, following the instructions she called up from the computer's memory banks. By the time the afternoon had come to its end, he was carrying on three experiments at a time, moving deftly from one console to another. She intervened only when two experiments reached critical phases at the same time.

"That was poor timing," he said later. "If I'd known that was going to happen, I'd have started one of them sooner."

"Philip," she said, laughing, "you're incorrigible."

"I try to be," he said.

"You ought to apply for the starship. You're a natural."

"Why should I do that? They don't have a theatre up there."

"But, Philip . . . you can do just about anything you want with a computer. I've never seen anything like it. You don't even understand half the things you're doing, I'm sure of it, but you . . . you're like part of the computer."

Philip smiled proudly. "We're a team," he said.

In the small apartment that they now shared, he watched as she went through her exercises, toning up for the semi-weightless conditions of the starship. He stayed out of her way, all too well aware of his own clumsiness away from his beloved computers.

"You ought to do them too," she said. "They'd be good for you."

"I'm in good shape," he replied.

"Besides, if you changed your mind, you'd be all set for the starship. You'd have a lot less work to do."

"I'm not applying for it," he said quietly, matter-of-factly.

Primrose Young had not been the first woman to pay attention to Philip. Starstruck struggling actresses had tried to use him as a stepping-stone, tying themselves to his coat-strings as a way into the world of successful theatre. Some had even succeeded in establishing careers as bit actresses. Philip had simply given a mental shrug or two and accepted their attention when he had it, missing it only briefly when it was gone.

But Primrose was something else. She wasn't using him as a stepping-stone for her own career. She had her own brilliant career going, one that had nothing to do with Philip Steinbrunner's world. He had accepted her placidly at first, soon learning of her obsession with the starship. It was just another part of her, unimportant at the time, since Philip thought she would just pass through his life as so many other people had.

But it didn't turn out that way this time. They grew together in a way he had never known before, and when she was accepted for the starship crew, he was unprepared.

"What'll I do?" Primrose asked, caught between her love for Philip and the need to satisfy her obsession. There were tears in her eyes but she wasn't yet crying.

"You'll do what you have to do," he said calmly, but beneath the calmness, a frantic part of his soul was begging to be set loose.

"I can't leave you," she said. "You've got to come with me."

"They won't let me," he said reasonably, shutting the door firmly

on his screaming soul. "I don't have any skills that they need. What place would a theatre technician have on a new world?"

"You could come as my mate, my husband. They'd have to let you come."

Philip smiled sadly. Only the echoes of his screaming soul were left. "No, they wouldn't, and you know it. They'd just replace you." The back of his hand brushed a snifter and Primrose caught it before it tumbled to the floor. "And what makes you think I'd want to go?"

"You wouldn't go?" Primrose looked at him in astonishment. She had never really considered the fact that anyone might not want to go on the starship.

"Of course not. I have everything I need right here. On the starship, I'd have nothing to do."

"But I can't stay here," she cried. "I have to go."

"Of course you do. I understand." He quickly cut off a faint wail from his soul. "You won't be happy if you don't go, and I won't be happy if I do."

"You don't love me," she accused.

"Of course I do."

**T**HEN THE WEEKS ran like water over marble; there was little time now to share the electric dawns as they had once done. Their moments together were brief and passionate, until finally Primrose was gone from Philip's life, orbitting over his head in the year's training and acclimatization she would undergo before the starship finally departed.

And Philip Steinbrunner could ignore his soul no longer.

Everything began to look like scenery stored in an empty theatre, stars on the ground, fences in the sky, and

rips and tears in the curtain of time. On his free nights, he went to the electric park to watch the twinkling starship streak overhead. Somewhere in that ungainly jumble, Primrose Young was preparing to leave Earth and Philip Steinbrunner behind.

It wasn't that he missed their infrequent lovemaking: their passion had primarily been one of minds, and she had pointed out doors to him that he had never bothered to notice before.

At last, Philip went to the agency in charge of recruiting and training starship crew members.

"I'm sorry," the administrator said after Philip had filled out a plethora of forms and taken scores of tests. "I'm afraid there is no place for you in the starship program, Mr. Steinbrunner. We're all very much impressed with your talents, especially your ability with computers, but there's just too many holes in your scientific background."

Undaunted, Philip turned inquisitor, drawing from the administrator the disciplines in which they were most interested.

"You're wasting your time, Mr. Steinbrunner," the Administrator said. "There's no possible way you could become proficient enough in these fields in time to make the starship crew."

**H**E ATTACKED the problem with an obsession that would have astounded Primrose Young and that did astound the people in the theatre world who were used to an easy-going Philip Steinbrunner. He severed all his ties with the theatre, then dove deeply into the computer, spending twelve to sixteen hours a day at it, learning about approach spirals, ecological degradation, quasars, positrons, organ

transplantation, learning theory, cyborg technology, and a dozen other things he had not known existed. He mastered set theory in three days; trigonometry took a little longer. Calculus eluded him until the theory of the point of accumulation, when all the threads came together in one glorious conclusion. Two hours later, he was once again confused. Relativity, quantum physics, organic chemistry: all were mastered to the point where Philip knew just how to query the computer on those points he had forgotten or had never known in the first place.

Philip became a true renaissance man in an age of specialists, not knowing perhaps as deeply and intuitively as a specialist, but aware of the nebulous bridges between disciplines. The combination of knowledge in two or more different areas sometimes brought him to conclusions that no one else had yet arrived at. His understanding of computers, their abilities and their shortcomings, fused with his new knowledge of organ transplantation and cyborg technology to convince him that those transplants considered "impossible" were indeed not so: an experienced surgeon teamed with a computer operator of Philip's ability, controlling the supportive functions that a computer could handle, made any transplant a possibility.

The technicians at the agency were amazed.

"It's impossible," they told the administrator. "The guy's absolutely incredible. There's only one other person on the starship who even approaches him."

"But it's too late," the administrator said. "The starship leaves in two months. The crew and backups have all been chosen, trained, and accli-

mated. There isn't enough time or room for another man and his support equipment and supplies."

"Never mind," said Philip. "Let me finish the course. Perhaps you'll need me after all. Perhaps there'll be a delay. Perhaps there'll be another starship."

"There'll be no other starship, and there'll be no major delays," the administrator said. "And we will not need you. You should have started this years ago. There's no way you can make the starship now."

"Yes, there is," Philip said softly.

**H**E LOOKED DOWN at himself through the video pickups of the operating room. He was connected directly to a computer through electrodes implanted into his brain. He couldn't feel them or sense them; the brain has no sensory input of its own. He would be guiding his own surgery, through computer-controlled waldos, aided by the computer's massive memory. He knew more than any surgeon and had exquisite control and microsecond precision. He no longer needed those blunt, stubby, clumsy-looking fingers. His fingers now were made of steel and aluminum and ended in saws and pincers and whatever other tools he needed.

Philip Steinbrunner was in his element now. He no longer was part of the computer nor was the computer an extension of his body and wishes; he and the computer were one.

**P**RIMROSE YOUNG floated gently to the aleph "floor" of the computer room. Her scalp had been shaved; lesions showed where dozens of pinpoint receptacles waited for their mates in the computer helmet that slipped easily over her head. There

were none of the clumsy, inefficient, and slow keyboard consoles for the starship's computer links.

Primrose strapped herself into the chair and settled the helmet over her head, feeling the insertion of the electrodes in an almost sexual manner. This was not by chance; the designers of the system had included several psychologists.

With her head now hooked into the Andromeda computer, she said "Ready" into the mouthpiece.

A new component had arrived less than twenty-four hours earlier, and was being mated to the system. There was quite a lot of attention being devoted to it.

A red light blinked on in Primrose's head, turning immediately to green. She thought the anagram that opened the circuits and one by one she entered the gates of the computer, feeling its resistance to her entry fall rapidly to zero. At each stage, she and the computer were tested to make sure that both were ready and compatible. At last she stood before the new module. There was a longer delay here before contact was completed.

"Hello?" The voice that resonated in her mind was the mechanical computer-voice that she always created in her brain, but it was yet somehow familiar. Something in the pauses, the way words were emphasized, banged at the doors of her subconscious.

"This is computer technician Primrose Young," she replied, "activating test sequence 48-Gauss-polynomial-three. The constants for this test are . . ."

"Relax, Primrose," the voice said. "We don't have to go through all

that."

Her subconscious finished its connections, and Philip's voice replaced the mechanical monotone.

"But . . . where are you?" she asked. "The new module . . ."

". . . is too small for a complete human being," he finished for her. "No, there wasn't enough time left to acclimate my body for the starship. But they needed my brain almost as much as I need to be with you."

For a moment she failed to understand, then the true impact and horror of what he had done reached her. "Oh, Philip," was all she could say.

He caught the pity and dismay in her tone and replied, "Don't be sorry for me, Primrose. It's what I wanted. Really."

"Oh, but, Philip . . ."

"Remember what Shakespeare said."

"Shakespeare?"

"'All the world's a stage.'"

"Yes."

"He was thinking small. I have the whole universe as my theatre now."

**S**LLOWLY, the starship moved out of its orbit, leaving Earth's gravity cage, toward Mars and then beyond, past Uranus and Pluto, breaking through, moving on out to the cold and the dark.

If you've only lived on Earth, you've never really seen the sun or known the promise of the village of stars. You can't move the stars. But you can move yourself and that can make just as much difference. Ask Philip Steinbrunner. He feels the planets in his body and he regrets nothing.

—GRANT CARRINGTON

*Steve Miller made his professional debut here with "Charioteer" (May); he returns with a story about a man whose problem was—*

# THE SOLUTION

## STEVE MILLER

**F**ROM A strict philosophical point of view the impossible cannot happen. Thus Rubay Glins proved that although it was extremely improbable, it was not impossible to survive the failure of Simultaneous Matter Translation in transit. Of course it was also considered nearly impossible for SMT to fail in the first place. It never had before.

Rubay Glins was a replacement for a replacement. Some thirty-five days before the scheduled flight of the Scout and Survey ship Crockett the Generalist had decided to stay on Earth in pursuit of a happiness she'd discovered on the beaches of Tahiti. Less than forty hours before flight Generalist Ardmore had managed to get in the way of a mugger in Boston's expanded DMZ. Although he would recover (while the mugger and two friends had not) it was decided that a broken arm might hamper his ability to operate.

Hence it was Rubay Glins, on his second trip into space, who had the unique opportunity of watching his spaceship peel as it began to materialize elsewhere. This property of SMT—moving a spaceship, crew of five, and plenty of supplies from here to there without traveling the intervening distance—was highly prized. The peeling was something new and unsought.

Glins, as Generalist, had nothing at

all to do during the few moments of Translation, except watch things go on around him. The slight lurch told him Translation had begun. Almost immediately things began to look strange.

The lights, for one thing, dimmed much too rapidly, and also refused to come back to their normal brilliance. Since Glins was new to the crew he was wearing all required gear, including full space suit. The other four members of the crew, all in the forward cabin, were less prone to follow directives. The radio carried the brief sound of someone yelling "Oh, shit" into the mike, and then the ship split into four or five long segments around Glins.

Glins noticed everything. The cabin decompressed rapidly. Walls moved away under the force of decompression. Whatever happened—Glins later favored the vibration theory—destroyed the main seams in the ship as if they were white glue in water.

Within five seconds of appearing in orbit around the distant and unnamed (but numbered) TTA-E77A, a roughly Earth-like planet discovered by automated probes, the Crockett was little more than an expanding conglomeraton of scrap metal.

Glins kept his seat for a moment or two more, until it became obvious that the long section of metal he was attached to was *not* the one he

wanted to be on. Attached to what had been the Crockett's left wall was the blister of the lifeboat. Being a practical man, Glins spent little time thinking. He jumped to that wall while it was a mere fifteen feet away, grabbing onto the spare suit rack which had been in the forward compartment.

Up ahead and to his right he could see the four figures belted into the remains of the flight deck. None of them showed any signs of motion, and since they weren't wearing suits in the vacuum, Glins decided that they wouldn't hear him if he tried the radio. He didn't.

Already the various portions of the space ship had begun to take up motions of their own. Glins worked his way down to the lifeboat blister, noticing how close to solar light was the light from this unnamed star. Barely a million kilometers away was the Earth-like planet they had come to explore, its brilliant South Polar region covering much of the hemisphere. The portions of the ship were spinning slightly, and the section he was on was starting to show signs of a slow tumble. He realized that if he stayed with it he would "catch-up" with the flight deck and might jump there.

No, there would be little use of that. The lifeboat was the immediate goal—later on he could decide what else had to be done.

The zee-gee pads on his boots allowed him to move cautiously toward the blister. Even though he knew the pads were supposed to be sufficient he crouched low to the hull metal. The first shot of adrenalin began to wear away—he could see it in the way his arms were starting to tremble.

Now the sections of the Crockett

were getting further apart. His suit told him that they were nearly one hundred meters away now—his own vision told him they must be two or three times farther away than that.

He corrected his thinking. This planet was at 1.1 A.U. from its primary, the primary was ever-so slightly smaller than Sol, if just a bit hotter. All this added up to the difference in his vision. The light was sun-like, but not exact. He would have to trust his instruments while in space.

The blister which held the lifeboat was in front of him now, full of shadows and dimples. "Ah," he said to himself, "this will cause a bit of a problem."

He checked his thinking. The plastic and boron fibers barely budged when he pushed against them. There was still air at ship-board pressures within the blister. If he released it at once it might start him spinning, perhaps tumble his section of hull into one of the other bits of debris. If it would release at all.

He sat on the door of the airlock for a few moments. The lock was set to accept vacuum on the other side, not on this side. He tried the mechanism, pushing the regular switch. Nothing. Registering a vacuum, it didn't want to open. The override handle, a long red-orange bar, didn't want to move either.

Glins sat watching the stars. None of them were familiar. He hadn't had time to study the local constellations; not time to identify direction. Sol could be ninety-five light years away in any direction.

"And miles to go before I sleep" he recited to himself. His suit had four or five more hours of oxygen. He realized that only forty minutes had gone by since the Crockett had flown between the huge foundationless pil-

lars five hundred thousand miles out from Earth. The distress signals the ship's computer might or might not be sending out wouldn't get home for ninety or a hundred years and he had five hours of breathing left.

"Shit," he said to himself. It sounded familiar.

Glins pondered for a few moments. He added up his supplies, provisions etc. He did have a tool kit. He wasn't sure if the zee-gee would permit him to muster enough force to pierce the plastic and boron shroud. The outerlock. Aha!

Twenty minutes later Glins was shaking his head again. The outerlock needed more power than he could muster. After all it was supposed to be operated from within. The outside controls were hooked into the ship's main power supply—a reactor which was drifting more than a thousand meters away.

Still, Glins was slightly happier. Another inventory of supplies showed that he had two spare suits on the racks. His supply of air was somewhat extended, and he had food supplies which would far outlast the air. The outside lock had merely been a good idea.

Merely an idea! He shook his head in wonder. Ideas were the reason for Generalists in the first place. Although his training extended into each of the other major areas of Search and Survey, the key was to be widely read and widely experienced. How far that went sometimes amazed non-Generalists.

Glins had been in the Army during the Amalgamation of Canada, had studied three languages and read histories for two months before proposing anything at all to the Army Staff. Once he'd started it was only a matter of time before other Generalists took

up his ideas, synthesized them, took new looks and came up with better approaches to the war.

Quebec surrendered quietly.

Glins sighed. He could use an idea right now. The various supplies for burning and building? Inside the lifeboat. Other heavy tools? Stored away inside one or another packets attached to the freight hold. They were a few thousand meters away and he had no maneuvering units.

Where do you get your ideas? Where do you get your ideas? A common question to Generalists, until it was a private joke. "Come on Glins," he said to himself, "Where do you get your ideas anyway?"

"Daydreams? Yes. Talking to yourself? Yes. Answering yourself? Yes."

At college Glins had pledged to a fraternity for a short time, until he decided that they weren't worth the bother. During one of the minor hazzings he'd answered the question the right way.

"C'mon idea man, where do you find ideas? You got an idea book somewhere?"

"It's simple. I think of a problem, and then I daydream a way out of it. Then I make a nightmare of it, to find out what's wrong with that idea. Then I daydream until I get it right."

That hadn't satisfied his abusers, and then they'd made the mistake of threatening a beating, just for fun, and probably unseriously. But Generalists survive, too.

"Suppose, though, that he hadn't gotten away," he said to himself. "What if they had put you here—how would you survive?"

"I was secretly a surgeon, so I took out my scalpel, the one I keep with me for emergency trachs . . . no. Cutting isn't the answer."

"They got you, do they, Glins?"

"Not yet they don't."

"I was secretly an electronics technician!"

Glins hastily removed a small tool kit from his belt. He checked the screwdriver size against that of the plate covering the controls. No way—the plate was locked into the fibers. It was not only screwed in, but was welded in an airtight seal. He'd need a hot-saw or a laser to get through that. The suit radio would open the inside doors of the boat, but wouldn't do anything with the ship's door.

"The problem's not with a problem, it's with someone else's solution to another problem."

Someone had suggested that to him, a professor. Solve their problem and you'll solve yours.

"The problems are that humans can't breath vacumn and that they must be protected in an emergency." He said to himself.

He nodded.

"The solution is to provide locks which prevent people from exposing themselves to vacumn."

Glins nodded again.

"So study the solution!"

The solution, it turned out, was difficult to study. There were no less than four reasonable methods for determining pressure on the other side of the lock. He carefully examined the lock until he found the correct one.

Even the emergency override would not operate without at least one-tenth the normal pressure. It said so in small print on a plate beside the door—a plate which assumed that the ship side would always have pressure.

The solution was obvious. Except that Glins would have to provide pressure to two sensors located five feet apart. More than one tenth normal pressure and not more than two

tenths above normal pressure. Solve someone else's problem.

Glins thought.

He role played.

He thought some more.

He changed oxygen bottles with one of the spare suits. Now there were ten hours left. And the twenty minutes or so left in his old tanks.

He became engineer. That didn't work. He became surgeon. That didn't work again. He became skydiver. That was useless.

He talked and talked to himself, cursing in three or four languages. He thought of the other tight situations he'd been in, looked for solutions there. He recalled the early history of the space program, finding no ideas there.

Glins found himself shaking. His breath came ragged in his ears now.

Maybe this was a problem without a solution, a locked room mystery with him the greatest locked room of all.

Glins found himself recalling a test in college. The problem was this: a condemned man wanted to avoid having his death be a spectacle. All of his efforts are directed toward somehow changing the decision of the court. He calls in a Generalist to act as his lawyer. The Generalist solves the problem within five minutes. How?

By providing a means of suicide.

Glins moved with the thought.

He is the surgeon, also carrying secret information the enemy must not have. A scalpel can be used to slit his throat, to destory the integrity of the spacesuit . . . that's it!

Glins moved as fast as the zee-gee allowed, thinking of himself as a surgeon or medic. The problem is to provide oxygen for someone who needs it, to allow survival.

He grabbed the emergency kit from

one of the spare suits, slapping at the activation button. The kit opened, displaying a remarkable variety of materials and objects.

Glins hastily took a roll of repair tape and several suit repair patches—and a scalpel. Unthreading the oxygen tanks from the two suits he moved to the airlock, carefully clamping the tanks and kit to the work surface. He couldn't afford to lose time chasing after things.

Picking up one tank he held it close to the suit patch, judging the size of the nozzle. With the scalpel he made an incision in the patch, pushing the nozzle through the hole as soon as it was made.

Foam bubbled out of the slit in the patch, sealing the tank nozzle in tightly. Glins repeated the process with the other tank.

Now he took the scalpel in his hands thoughtfully.

"Here goes, Dr. Glins."

Using the blade, Glins made a large circular cut in the material of the patch. As it began to foam up he pressed it around the sensor.

The second patch was harder to cut, and for a moment he got the foam sealant uncomfortably close to the edge of his own suit. He knew that if it touched he'd never get it separated. These patches were meant to be permanent.

The bubbling was slowing down as he pressed the patch to the dimple shaped depression that marked the second sensor. He turned the

feed valve, moved to turn the feed valve on the first tank.

Wrapping his arm with tape, Glins checked the controls. While the regular door control would open slowly, it was more likely to jam.

Wrapping the tape around the emergency lever, and then taping his left leg to the side of the airlock, Glins decided that he was ready.

With a jerk, he pulled the lever.

For a second he thought nothing was going to happen at all.

Then he heard a distant whoosh—heard it through the helmet! Air rushed out as the airlock door popped open. The tumbling increased and the tape holding him to the door was drawn taut.

Not eight meters away was the inner sanctuary he'd been seeking—the lifeboat.

His suit broadcast the proper signal and the outerlock to the lifeboat's entrance was open before he could finish cutting his way out of the tape which held him to the door. In moments he was inside, helmet off, breathing air that he knew wouldn't run out soon.

Looking down at Crockett, yes that would do as a name for a planet he'd be living on until the SMT gate people came to open a gate going the other way, Glins decided that he'd do everything as simply as possible. After all, it wasn't the problem solving that was so bad, it was solving the solutions that left him breathless.

—STEVE MILLER

# CRUTCH

## ROBERT F. YOUNG

*He held the key to the future in his hands—a future only he could understand . . .*

Illustrated by RODAK

The Sphinx: *What has four feet in the morning, two at noon and three at night?*

Oedipus: *Man.*

The Sphinx: *Wrong!*

“THE BATTLE of Bloody Ridge”, as the engagement subsequently came to be called, was a misnomer. The Mizarites, while human in most other respects, were bloodless; and since they had no weapons with which to defend themselves against the 2435th, other than those endowed them by nature, it was doubtful that the 2435th shed any blood either.

But what the Battle had lacked in blood-soaked ground it had more than made up for in Mizarite corpses. In places they were piled so high as to resemble sandbag fortifications. The foot soldiers of the 2435th, however, had no difficulty climbing over them. Sergeant Glencannon Frost least of all. He had been young and nimble then, and wiry-strong. And as epinephrine-drunk as his buddies. With them, he tore over the “bags” and down the opposite slope of the ridge into the dry valley where the dune-huts of the Mizarite village reflected Mizar’s unanalyzable green-gold rays. But the village proved to be deserted. The women and children had fled to the nearby barren hills, taking with them as many of their

possessions as they could gather on such short notice. As for the old men, they were part of the “fortifications” on the ridge.

The surprise attack had been one of many that had taken place that day in Zone D. “Demonstrations” in official parlance; “little Hiroshimas” in the parlance of the press. Their sole purpose had been to convince the obstinate Mizarites that continued resistance to relocation would no longer be countenanced by the Terran Authority. Zone D represented only a tiny wedge of Mizar II’s vast land area, but it was the only piece of the planetary pie that was fit for human consumption. It might be little more than sand and rocks and bony hills, but a few redirected rivers could transform it into Eden overnight.

The victorious 2435th, raze rifles at ready, stormed across the siliceous sands of the valley floor, the exhilaration of battle still bubbling in their bloodstreams. Souvenir-hungry, they swarmed like locusts into the narrow streets of the village—

“IN RETROSPECT, sir, do you attribute your decision to set right the wrongs you helped commit to second thinking alone?”

Slowly, agonizingly, Terran Secretary of State Glencannon Frost came back through the dimensions and the

darknesses and the decades to his duplex high in the Henry A. Kissinger Building where the historic interview was being taped. He realigned his shriveled body in his deep, leather-upholstered armchair, as though to prevent the period piece from devouring all that was left of his flesh and bones. Simultaneously he rested his cane across his atrophied thighs. The pose was classic Glencannon Frost, a career-long companion to the one where he stood, cane planted firmly on the ground before him, both hands resting on its globular knob, gazing straight into the lens of whatever camera happened to be before him.

His time-dulled eyes focused on Anchorwoman Larrimore, whose question had provided the fuel for his return-trip from the stars. "Quite possibly my decision resulted, in part at least, from a recrudescence of the genetic guilt often found in members of my ethnic group."

"You are referring no doubt to your—ours, I should say, for all of us here are of 'New World' descent—ancestors' maltreatment of the Amerinds?"

"Yes," Frost said.

"You were cited during the Mizar 'demonstrations', were you not," asked Phelan of WorldPress, "for exemplary zeal in the performance of your duties, and, after the Mizarites' capitulation, decorated with the Platinum Star? How, sir, do you reconcile this early determination of yours to take away the Mizarites' land with your subsequent determination to give it back?"

"I have never attempted such a reconciliation. But I would hazard the guess that, in addition to the genetic guilt I mentioned a moment ago, my moral metamorphosis resulted from a



delayed ethical reaction to the looting of the dune-hut village that ensued the Battle of Bloody Ridge and to the near-extinction by the 2435th of the villagers' repulsive housepets, whose existence prior to that time was unknown, both to us and to the Terran Authority."

"But that was the typical aftermath of every battle fought that day, was it not?" objected Avers of NewsCom. "Moreover, if I recall Terran history correctly, looting almost invariably follows victory in battle. One might go so far as to call it a part of tradition. As for the housepets you tried to exterminate"—the shudder that shook Avers' ectomorphic frame was preserved along with his words by the automated, globe-shaped audio-visual recording unit that drifted like a breeze-blown child's balloon from interviewer to interviewee and back again—"I happen to have seen a photo of one of the loathesome creatures—the only photo ever taken of them, I believe—and I should consider it odd indeed if you *hadn't* tried to exterminate them."

Anchorwoman Larrimore said, "It has never been brought to light why the Mizarites kept such peculiar pets in their houses, doting on them, apparently, much as we humans dote on dogs. Do you know why, sir?"

"No," Frost lied.

Deep in his mind, deep in the past, deep in space, he recoiled as the silvery horror ran blindly out of the first dune-hut he came to and streaked between his legs. His reaction was as instinctive as it was conditioned: he pivoted, simultaneously lowering his raze rifle, and aimed and blazed. The "snog" dissolved instantaneously into a tiny mound of powdery dust that, moments later, commingled with the siliceous sand.

A second snog appeared in the doorway of the dunehut on his right. He got it before its tiny, agate-like eye became accustomed enough to the brilliant green-gold sunlight for it to flee. Throughout the village, raze rays flashed as the pet population erupted. Some of the snogs—the larger ones—ran in upright positions. For some reason this made them more repulsive yet. It also made them harder to see, a difficulty compounded by the way they blended into their native background. But the foot soldiers of the 2435th were crack raze-riflemen: a few of the snogs made it to the hills; the dust of the thousands that didn't became indistinguishable from the siliceous sands of their birthplace.

"FRANKLY, SIR—"Avers of NewsCom—"I find it difficult to believe that the tenuous pair of motives you've supplied us could possibly have been responsible for the one-man jihad you embarked upon immediately following your separation from the Space Service; for the incredible one-upmanship you displayed in your thirty-year campaign for the post you now occupy and which you virtually created yourself; or for the tenacity you exhibited, both before and afterward, in delaying Zone D colonization and finally aborting it. Overall, I simply cannot comprehend how concern for a dead cause and concern for one that should have been dead could have combined to lend you the necessary vitality and force to coerce so sophisticated a political body as the Terran Authority into returning to its original owners a tract of land as large as Texas and valued conservatively at \$50,000,000,000; a tract of land, moreover, that constitutes the *only* habitable territory we

have thus far found among the stars."

Frost said, "The real reason you cannot understand, Mr. Avers, is totally unrelated to the motives I provided you. It arises from a universal defect of the human psyche. Mentally, each member of the human race lives in a little cell built of bricks shaped by his personal and vicarious experiences and by those handed down genetically from his ancestors. Whenever he regards reality in any form he does so through the bars of that cell. As a result, everything he sees is automatically reduced to the commonplace, be it ever so phenomenal. When, to take a random example, our prisoner sees an uninhabited house, he immediately assumes that the inhabitants either built it, had it built, or were attracted by it, bought it and moved in. Under ordinary circumstances such an assumption is harmless enough; it is when our prisoner sees a similar inhabited house under *unordinary* circumstances and makes the same assumption that he leaves himself wide open to the dangers inherent in misconceptions. Because under *unordinary* circumstances the exact opposite of his assumption may be the case—that is, the house, attracted by available inhabitants, bought them and moved them in (or, in the absence of available inhabitants, created them and moved them in), possibly, though not necessarily, for the purpose of maintaining itself. And this is exactly what our theoretical prisoner is incapable of assuming, or, in most cases, even of conceiving. It is this defect in Man's *manière de voir* that doomed him to fail in his attempted colonization of space before he even got off the ground."

"I'm afraid I don't follow you at all, sir," Avers of NewsCom said.

"But we *haven't* failed in our attempted colonization of space" fervently objected Phelan of WordPress. "Granted, thanks to your having finally prevailed upon our better natures to give Zone D back to the Indians, so to speak, we've suffered a severe setback. But we still have searchships out there; there are other stars, other worlds. The returns aren't all in yet—far from it."

Old Glencannon Frost sighed.

Young Glencannon Frost paused just within the doorway of a dune-hut that was somewhat larger than its neighbors. There was only one room; there were no windows. A slanted shaft of sunlight came through a small smoke hole in the roof: all else was gloom. Beneath the smoke hole, built against the rear wall and just out of range of the light, was a primitive clay hearth. Ranged at intervals along the base of the concave walls were a number of grass-mat pallets, and in the round room's center stood a flat-topped rock, indubitably the equivalent of a table.

There were no utensils, no pieces of pottery, no examples of native art; the room, apparently, contained no worthwhile artifacts of any kind. But wait!—what was that on the mantel above the hearth?—

Young Glencannon Frost pulled his beamer from his belt—

Old Glencannon Frost said, "All the returns do not need to be in, in order for a campaign to be over."

**M**OVING ON from the subject of your motivation," Anchorwoman Larimore said briskly, "can you tell us, sir, why the score of the SAGCT you took as part of your Space Army entrance-exams is erroneously listed in your record as a mere one-oh-five?"

"Why do you say 'erroneously', Ms. Larrimore?"

"Surely, in view of your later achievements, it couldn't possibly have been correct, sir. The blithe ease with which you sailed through Princeton after your separation alone impugns it, while your stunning record as consultant for SolCoInc and your subsequent rise to the vice presidency of the cartel renders it downright absurd."

"I must say, Ms. Larrimore, you do your homework well."

"All of us do," said Avers of NewsCom smugly. "Add to the discrepancy just pointed out by Ms. Larrimore the following. In a secondary school composition you made this statement." Avers consulted his notes. "'God meant for more than the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and the beasts of the fields to be Man's to do with as he pleases: He meant the stars too.' Years later, in a speech given at Yale on the occasion of your receiving an honorary degree there, you averred, 'The criminal confiscation of Zone D and the cruel transference of its rightful inhabitants against their will to the northern barrens of Mizar II can, like the near-ecological disaster of the late-twentieth century, be traced back to words uttered in good faith but in bad wisdom by a well-meaning teacher of righteousness in the kindergarten period of our civilization when there existed no discernible limit to the bounty spread out beyond the classroom windowpanes.' How do you correlate these two widely disparate statements, sir?"

"Disregarding for the moment the affront to my personal privacy implied by your unconscionable prying into my past," Frost said coldly, "have you, Mr. Avers—or you, Ms. Larrimore, or you, Mr. Phelan—

wholeheartedly adhered in later years to *any* of the beliefs you held sacred in your youth?"

"No, of course not." Phelan of WorldPress. "But *we* are the interrogators, whereas *you*, sir, are the interrogated. Furthermore, we happen to represent—despite our common ethnic background—the majority of the peoples of Earth, who, in our considered opinion, have been had. By you."

A faint quivering of Frost's shriveled lips suggested what might have been a smile. The dull pain in his faded brown eyes belied it. "No more than I, Mr. Phelan—no more than I. But ultimately the victor may find that the eye he so cruelly plucks out in compensation for his own lost optic is his own lost optic."

"You talks in riddles, sir," said Avers of NewsCom.

"Not at all. What single characteristic would you say—Mr. Avers, Ms. Larrimore, Mr. Phelan—furnishes the fuel that lifts a potentially intelligent species out of the muck of nescience? What is this fuel that provides the remarkable energy that transforms a lowly animal into the semblance of a god? What *really* lies behind the willed evolution we sometimes speak of as the 'life force'? Without which any species is doomed to crawl or trot or brachiate till the Bard's last syllable of recorded time?"

"I can see the sanctimonious word poised on your tonguetips. 'Ambition.' Ambition—bah! The characteristic I refer to is the urge to get even—with the environment, with one another, ultimately with other species—for real or imagined wrongs. This is what enables potentially intelligent creatures to rise above their unmotivated peers—to create, invent, subdue, overcome—till they meet an enemy

similarly fueled but far more sly than they. I speak of Vengeance. Ambition is an abstraction—at best, a sweet scent we add to the fuel to camouflage its noisome nature!"

"An interesting theory, sir,"—Phelan of WordPress—"but one, I fear, that throws more light upon its author than upon the human race."

Old Frost said, "I was not referring exclusively to the human race."

Young Frost bathed the rear wall of the dune-hut with the beamer's beam, bringing into sharp relief the silvery object he had discerned upon the mantle above the hearth. He gasped; then, breathless, he strode across the room and took the object down. Instantly he felt cold, cruel tentacles dig into his brain. His beamer slipped from his fingers, fell forgotten to the floor. The tentacles slightly relaxed their grip, but did not withdraw. Frost knew they never would.

ANCHORWOMAN LARRIMORE said, "We've found that our audiences appreciate a human touch whenever a great man such as yourself is interviewed by members of the Media, so if you don't mind, sir, I would like to ask a personal question or two before our time expires. It is said—and innumerable tapes and still-shots bear it out—that even as a college student you carried a cane. Was it—has it always been—the same silvery one you carry now?"

"Yes," answered old Glencannon Frost.

"Is it a Mizarite cane of the sort that the natives, both male and female, had with them during the series of negotiations conducted by the Terran Authority and which were conspicuously absent during the subsequent surprise attacks carried out

by the Authority when the negotiations ultimately failed and which reappeared when the survivors of the 'demonstrations' were transported to their New Home? In short, sir, is it a souvenir that you somehow managed to get through customs upon your return to Earth?"

"It is."

"In retrospect, sir," Anchorwoman Larrimore continued, "would you say that your carrying it during your college- and early-career years, when you have no need for such an assist, was a deliberate attempt on your part to lay the foundation for your forthcoming public image?"

"So it would appear."

"Thank you, sir—"

"One more question, please," interposed Phelan of WordPress. "It was pretty well established at the time of the 'demonstrations' that the so-called snogs were life-forms generated millennia ago by the interaction of Mizar's rays with the siliceous sands of the Zone D area. Later, the theory was advanced that these creatures had a unique life-cycle, during which their appendages gradually atrophied and ultimately disappeared, at which time death occurred and petrification set in, and that in this final, petrified form they were the canes carried by the Mizarites. That are still carried by them to this day. Can you throw any light on this mystery, sir?"

"No," Frost lied.

"I'm sorry, but our time has expired," announced Anchorwoman Larrimore. She threw a meaningful glance at the audio-visual globe, and the globe obediently floated over to where she sat and went into hover-position before her face. "Ladies and Gentlemen, this is Anchorwoman Priscilla Larrimore. You have just wit-

nessed, and listened to, an interesting interview with Terran Secretary of State Glencannon Frost, conducted by the World Network with the able assistance of Baines Phelan of WorldPress and Sidney Avers of NewsCom. Our questions now are ended. We, the interviewers, will soon be melted into air. We wish to thank this noble gentleman sitting in our midst for his kind cooperation and you, our gentle audience, for your kind concern, for we are such stuff as news is made on, and our public lives are bounded by your dials."

**L**EFT ALONE, Frost lifted the cane from his lap and stood it in an upright position. He gazed into its single agate-like eye, searching for compassion and finding instead what he had always found: naked hatred and an utter inability to forgive.

"When beings like you are as good as dead," he said, "why don't you have the decency to die?"

*Because God gave us crutches to walk with. But I, at least, shall shortly die, since the task I was left*

*behind for is completed. However, I shall not die alone."*

"No," Frost said, "I didn't think you would."

*Unfortunately your merciless massacre of our children left us no other choice.*

Frost said, "I think you deliberately left them in the villages so there would be no other choice." He sighed. Then, "The equivalent of how many H-bombs?"

*You are confusing hyperpsychotechnology with hypertechnology, just as you always do, said the cane. I contain the equivalent of a clock—not the equivalent of a bomb. A clock I've attuned, during this final decade of our symbiosis, to the minds of the guardians of the common USSR-People's Republic of China's thermonuclear stockpile. It remains but for me to turn myself on.*

"I should have guessed," Frost said. And then, resignedly, "How long?"

Tick, went the cane. Tick-tick-tick.

—ROBERT F. YOUNG

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### ON SALE NOW IN FANTASTIC (Oct.)

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# ...OR SO YOU SAY



Letters intended for publication should be typed, double-spaced, on one side of each sheet, and addressed to Or So You Say, Box 409, Falls Church, Va. 22046.

Dear Ted:

Since an offhand line in my 50-year history of sf article which appeared in the June, 1976 AMAZING seems to have inadvertently touched off a major exchange on the magazine's history, I claim a brief right of comment: I think that Perry's article in the May, 1978 issue is a remarkable work of scholarship and a genuine contribution to the historical work which has been done on the field in recent years. To the degree that he is correct—and I see no basis on which to doubt his authenticity, research or dependability—significant new insight can be acquired.

Perry's dogged work (for a historian, by the way, he writes remarkably well; in fact he writes remarkably well for a writer altogether) has the corollary benefit of once again showing that Sam Moskowitz, the self-appointed and self-proclaimed historian of this field, just is not dependable and not trustworthy. If reaching a kind of equivocal maturity means that we have to see Gernsback for what he was, then the same is consequently true of Moskowitz. That Sam seems to have this perception also—that their reputations are irrevocably linked—may explain his bellows of pain, rage and personal abuse

at the suggestion of truth.

BARRY N. MALZBERG  
Teaneck, N.J. 07666

Dear Sir:

Tom Perry was kind enough to send me an advance copy of your May, 1978 issue of AMAZING SCIENCE FICTION STORIES which contains his article, "An Amazing Story: Experimenter in Bankruptcy."

I want you to know that, insofar as it relies on information from me about the bankruptcy, it is thoroughly accurate.

ROBERT HALPERN  
Law Offices of Robert Halpern  
225 Broadway  
New York, N.Y., 10007

Dear Ted:

The sf community owes a debt to Tom Perry for his enterprising research. I found his article on Hugo Gernsback (in the May issues) completely fascinating. Though I still feel a certain gratitude to our Hugo for printing my first stories, these fresh facts certainly confirm my own old impressions of his business methods.

I can add one small footnote. The evidence seems pretty strong that Gernsback took the Experimenter mailing lists with him. Something else I know he took is a manuscript of mine, which I had submitted to AMAZING STORIES. He wrote to offer me "standard space rates" for using it in the new Science Wonder Stories.

*Naively—it was only my second*

*story—I accepted the offer without asking what the "standard space rates" would be. He printed the story as "The Alien Intelligence." A novelette, 25,000 words, it ran as a two-part serial. His check, when it came, was \$75.00—about a quarter of a cent a word. AMAZING would have paid me more.*

JACK WILLIAMSON  
Portales, N.M. 88130

Dear Mr. White:

I have never written to a magazine before but now have to comment on Tom Perry's extremely biased article re: Experimenter. First of all he states the following facts: 1) 60-75% of Experimenter's liabilities were owed to two companies—Art Color and Bulkley Dunton & Co. 2) They had an officer at Experimenter, a Mr. Macklin, to protect their interests. 3) A petition of involuntary bankruptcy was taken against Experimenter on Feb. 20, 1929. 4) The above petition was not opposed. 5) Within six weeks the companies were sold for an amount equal to the net of liabilities less assets plus \$20,000 for legal fees. 6) Legal fees turned out to be \$70-80,000. 7) Federal taxes were assessed at \$40,000, later reduced to \$12,000—accounted for by bankruptcy losses. 8) A final dividend of .85 was paid to unhappy creditors. 9) Radio station loss \$80,000 in 1927-8. 10) The Gernsbacks drew about \$100,000 annually.

Now he does not tell us: 1) monthly income of Experimenter, that is the monthly cash flow; 2) how past due were the amounts owed, one day? one week? one month? one year? 3) why these companies saw fit to give Experimenter over \$300,000 credit in 1929 especially when they had an overseer watching the funds; 4) why with such large liabilities were the notes so small, \$2,000 each against a total liability of over \$100-\$200,000.

Now may I please give my alternate world idea of what happened, based

on the above facts. The holders of 60-75% of the liabilities of Experimenter either could not control the Gernsbacks or they had a deal (an offer they could not refuse) for the Experimenter Co. In order to complete this offer it was necessary to place Experimenter in bankruptcy without notice to the principals. No one knows what negotiations were underway when the judgments were taken, but the Gernsbacks did not expect to be adjudged bankrupt and could not protect themselves because assets could be seized to satisfy a judgment and these companies could take judgments ad infinitum the bankruptcy was not oppressed—the Gernsbacks decided to go into business again.

When a company goes bankrupt its assets are normally sold for bargain basement prices, however in this case a deal was made to realize large sums for the intangible assets in such a short time that we can conclude that the transactions were made before the bankruptcy petition.

Based on the above I would think that Hugo and Sidney Gernsback had a case for saying the company was stolen from them. However we will not know if Art and Bulkley gave the Gernsbacks a chance to change suppliers, reorganize on their own, or close unprofitable divisions. We know that they tried to force a sale to Macfadden. It seems as if they did not trust the Gernsbacks to lie down and die unless they took the steps that were taken.

Why am I writing? Perry's insulting style and biased reporting. He spent time, effort and did an extremely thorough job, for what? Was he mad at Moskowitz, Gernsbacks, or just plain mean and snarky?

Conclusions: Although I do not know Perry, Moskowitz, or the Gernsbacks and never met any of them, the facts brought to light by Mr. Perry seem to support Moskowitz more than contradict him. For exam-

ple he overlooks a \$40,000 income tax claim, what profit in 1928, 7,6 would attract that much tax. I don't know but it must have been very big. Perry had two dusty boxes of documents and only looked at the documents that could prove his claims, anything else went unreported. Not only that but even when he could prove Moskowitz wrong by the facts, Moskowitz was right in the spirit.

After the Gernsbacks went back into business, they apparently were successful and had a long career, likely with good credit, good relations with their creditors, and a reasonable source of authors. They do not seem to be as unethical as Perry paints them.

STANLEY SILVERMAN

4216 Ste. Helene

Chomedey, Quebec, H7W1P3,  
Canada

P.S. Why the heck did you not see the fantastic prejudice and onesidedness and refuse to publish?

*Tom Perry replies:*

Stanley Silverman's letter about my article on the bankruptcy of Experimenter Publishing Company reveals a misapprehension about how research is done, as evidenced by his statement that "Perry had two dusty boxes of documents and only looked at the documents that could prove his claims, anything else went unreported." Now aside from the fact that this is impossible—how do you know what a document contains unless you look at it?—it assumes that I held some preconceived "claims" which I then sought to substantiate, ignoring contradictory evidence. Quite the opposite is true. I started with the assumption that Sam Moskowitz's version of the bankruptcy was true, and only looked up the story in the *New York Times* out of idle curiosity.

And when I discovered, to my astonishment, that a story that had been circulated unchallenged in the SF world for going on two decades was

patently false, I then started to try finding out what really *did* happen. I thank Silverman for saying I did "an extremely thorough job," and hasten to assure him that I did not suppress anything that would support the Moskowitz version. There wasn't anything.

I cited all my sources in my articles—the *New York Times*, the court records, *U.S. Supreme Court Reports*, and a lawyer who was involved in the case—so that anyone who wanted to could verify my statements. I note with pleasure that one reader—Steve Davidson of Cherry Hill, N.J.—has already done so.

The questions Silverman would have me answer are mostly unanswerable. As I said in the article, the Irving Trust Company destroyed most of its records in the case in 1939. No sinister motives can be assumed from this—it is routine business practice. Ten years had passed since the discharge of the bankrupt. No charge of conspiracy had been made publicly at that time, and would not be for another twenty years, when Sam Moskowitz first published it in a brochure.

So the monthly income of Experimenter can only be guessed at. I would observe that if, as Silverman suggests, it was "very big," another question arises: Why wasn't it used to pay off the debts?

As for how old the debts were, we have lawyer Robert Halpern's statement that they were "long overdue."

Why did the printer and paper supplier extend the credit? I don't know. Perhaps they expected the Gernsbacks to pay.

And why were the notes to Art Color Printing Company, which totaled \$175,000, in the range of \$2,000? I can only speculate that each note represented the printing bill for one issue of one magazine. That would mean over eighty such notes. With four quarterly and four monthly magazines, they would then represent

about a year's worth of issues.

If the Gernsbacks "had a case for saying the company was stolen from them"—then why didn't they say so? They did not contest the bankruptcy petition and made no conspiracy charges either through the courts or the press. Hugo Gernsback was interviewed by national newsmagazines several times between 1929 and his death in 1967; no charge of conspiracy appears in these articles.

As for the method of deriving the unusually high recovery rate from the bankrupt corporation by continuing its operations under different management—this suggests not a conspiracy against the Gernsbacks, but wise action by the creditors, backed by the resources of the Irving Trust Company. It has since been written into the bankruptcy law as the standard way of paying off the debts of a company whose insolvency arose through bad management.

I don't know how to answer Silverman's charge of bias, other than to echo his statement about not knowing any of the principals personally. I do admit to a belief in honest reporting of facts, and confess I don't understand how Moskowitz can be "right in the spirit" if he is "wrong by the facts." Does there exist some higher plane of existence, perceptible only to cosmic minds, where the *New York Times* said what Moskowitz says it said?

TOM PERRY

Boca Raton, FL 33432

*If I may, as a postscript, deal with Silverman's P.S., I must say that "the fantastic prejudice and onesidedness" in this affair does not appear to originate with Tom Perry, nor did I find it in his article. Like everyone else, I took the original Moskowitz story to be truthful when I first encountered it, and it was not until I read Tom's first piece on the subject—which appeared here as a guest editorial in our July, 1977 issue—that I realized that Moskowitz's version might be more*

*mythological than factual. Things might have stopped there but for Sam's response to that guest editorial—his letter in our October, 1977 issue. His abuse of Perry, his distortion of both what Perry had said and the evident facts of the case, all acted as a goad. It was time to clear the air by researching the matter as thoroughly as possible, getting the real facts out, and letting the chips fall where they might. This Perry did, and I think the three letters which preceded Silverman's bear out Perry's honesty and diligence. I might add that Silverman's letter is the only negative response we've received to Perry's article in our May, 1978 issue—and was received in a handwritten form which required retyping for inclusion here. I did receive a letter from Sam Moskowitz before the publication of Perry's article—which I forwarded to Tom—in which Sam warned me of possible lawsuits from the Gernsback estate if we pursued the matter further than had already been done at that time. No lawsuits—or threats thereof—nor any further communications from Moskowitz followed the publication of "An Amazing Story: Experimenter in Bankruptcy."—TW*

Dear Ted:

My knowledge of Ray Palmer primarily comes from collecting back issues of his magazines. He switched to Flying Saucers about the time I began buying SF magazines. But through those six year old issues of *Other Worlds*, I came to know Rap. The fiction couldn't touch what I was reading each month in Cele Goldsmith's *AMAZING* and *FANTASTIC* but Cele was just a name on a masthead. The editorials were even by someone else. With a Palmer magazine, you could not miss his presence.

It made enough of an impression on me that years later, while buried in Vietnam, I wrote Rap a fan letter ask-

ing him why he didn't give SF another go. He never answered but I'm glad I thanked him for the enjoyment he had given me.

He was a promoter and a good one but he was also a good editor. When it is all added up, I hope fans remember that Palmer published some excellent stories by Van Vogt ("Enchanted Village"), Bradbury ("Way in the Middle of the Air"), and Russell ("Dear Devil").

Palmer gave Edgar Rice Burroughs his only steady market during the 40's and the results were ERB's best stories of his last two decades. P. Schuyler Miller said he could forgive Palmer for the Shaver Mystery just for giving us the Hoka series. There were some gems even in the pure pulp. Rog Phillips' "So Shall Ye Reap" was a gripping novel despite its many flaws.

I can even forgive Rap his excesses because they were interesting. Palmer began the Shaver thing to prove a point to Howard Browne, who had tossed the first Shaver manuscript in the trash can. Actually, there were two points: a) one man's crackpot is another's prophet and b) he could make a writer out of anyone with an imagination and a vocabulary of 800 words.

You have to like an editor who will spend four pages of his magazine replying to a hostile letter saying he knew Shaver couldn't write (or plot or spell or type) but he had imagination. "Don't you think I know the faults in Bryne's writing? In Shaver's? In Phillips?" he answered Don Wilson's letter in February 1953.

On editing: "Editing, Don, isn't what you think it is. Editing isn't what most editors think it is. Most editors are editors because it was the job they managed to land, and the money they earn keeps them in it! The money, not the joyous exercise of their talent and the grateful acquiring of ability in that talent."

That same reply contained what could stand as Rap's epitaph: "I look

at life with an eagerness to learn everything I can, but not just to learn. To be able to do, is my ambition. I have certain talents, but I realize humbly they are extremely minor, and very rare. I am forced, because of lack of real talent, to work to develop abilities to compensate. I want to make things. With my hands and my brain I want even to know how to create a world and be able to do it. I want to live billions on uncounted billions of years, and work all the time. I want to face problem after problem, more difficult than before. I want to strive to my utmost. And when I've finished with a thing, I want it to be a source of happiness to my fellow man. . . I want to give it as a gift to those I love, you people, readers, writers, editors, fellow workers."

Thanks, Rap, for all the gifts.

RICHARD A. MOORE  
2148 Fairhaven Circle NE  
Atlanta, Georgia 30305

*I think you've summed up my own feelings on Ray Palmer very well.*

-TW

Dear Ted,

Happy days are here again with AMAZING! Your May 1978 issue is tops. I really enjoyed Tom Perry's article, "An Amazing Story: Experiment in Bankruptcy." As a Galaxy reader, I do recognize Charles Sheffield. His new story, "Sight of Proteus" indicates, as you have pointed out, that this new science fiction writer will have a definite impact. Nonetheless, his bio-form change projects science fiction into a distance future that holds new wonders for the human form and for man. Man-Woman interchange provides a concern not only for the physical change over but for the physiological effects. It will be interesting to see how Charles Sheffield develops other stories in his series.

ROY D. SCHICKEDANZ  
910 Sherwood Lake Dr., #3-B  
Schererville, Ind. 46375

## Editorial (cont. from page 4)

the huge success sci-fi is now enjoying in Hollywood. He could never have predicted that the most popular movie of all time would be a sci-fi picture called *Star Wars*, much less that it would achieve its stunning success at the box-office within less than a year (unlike perennials like *Gone With the Wind*, which took years to break records).

Looking back, it's very easy to understand what happened, even if it was less obvious to predict.

Science fiction makes special demands upon its readers. To begin with, the reader must be willing to accept situations and ideas which stretch one's intelligence and imagination. This has never been popular; every stf fan can think of instances in school when he or she was ridiculed by classmates for "believing in that junk." Superficially this may seem less true today, but only superficially. The mental elasticity required to "get into" real science fiction is simply not common in our culture—nor any other, for that matter.

The phrase most commonly linked with that of science fiction over the past thirty or more years is "sense of wonder." A stf reader cannot help but have this sense, this almost mystical awe at the grandiose wonders of our vast universe, and the magical delight in exploring those wonders.

The magic of the printed word is that it suggests so much more than it says: it stimulates our minds to *create* what has only been sketched in print. Reading fiction for pleasure is a minority activity in our society. Even the best-selling works of fiction reach only one out of every hundred—or even less—of the citizens in this country. Many children grow up disliking reading, regarding it as a chore, forced upon them in schools. As adults they will read newspapers and non-fiction magazines, if they read at all. Why?

Because they never learned that they could use their imaginations

when they read fiction: that they could visualize and mentally recreate what they read about.

Television has helped this process along; the estimates of functional illiteracy in the United States are higher today than they were thirty years ago. When a box will present you with ready-made visual images, why bother to do it yourself? The more television has improved, technically, the more insidious its appeal has become, and the more perfectly it has substituted itself for individual imagination.

Science fiction has never been comfortably suited to the visual media. So much that we could mock up in our minds' eyes is all but impossible to create on a screen. The very lack of definition in one's mental image could keep it magical and awesome: the realization of the same image on film or tape is inevitably pedestrian.

What, then, are we to make of the new popularity of sci-fi in the visual media, especially the movies?

There have been some major technical advances in filmmaking which have helped narrow the gap. Computer graphics—described here in Gregory Benford's *The Science in Science Fiction* several years ago—are coming into their own, and still are in the pioneer form.

. But, basically, it's not the same.

The images are ready-made. The audience has only to sit back, passive, and accept what's fed to it. Little active participation is required. One can leave one's imagination at home.

There are more people around who consider themselves "unimaginative"—or never considered the point at all—than there are those who enjoy the stimulation of their imaginations. This has always been true and seems likely to remain that way.

They make a much bigger audience.

Which leaves science fiction in the genre ghetto, for better or worse, languishing still, while something which has aped its appearance and

(cont. on page 125)

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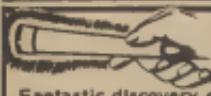
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You may know Glen Cook for his novel, *Heirs of Babylon*. Here, in short close focus, he tells the brief story of—

# PONCE

## GLEN COOK

Illustrated by TONY GLEESON

FOR ME it started the day we got the new car. New in that we didn't have it before. It was a '62 Continental that the dude painted canary yellow (with a broom, it looked like) to get me to take it. It was our first. You got six kids, one trying to make the breakout in college, push a broom and moonlight as a watchman, and have a mama that's got to go to the kidney machine every three days and has diabetes besides, food stamps don't go very far, even if you can trade them off for something besides beans. We were proud of that car. Seven years we'd been saving pennies and nickels in a big lard can I got from the bakery. Once some kids broke in and got it, but that was early, when there was only a few dollars. We hid it good after that. Nobody ever found it.

First thing we did was go for a ride, cats and all. Sarah borrowed a camera from our downstairs neighbor, Wanda, and got some film with money she had, and we went to the zoo, then just rode around, showing it off.

People looked. That car was *ugly*. The kids all grinned and waved. The cats got sick and kept trying to get out.

We got home with some daylight and film left. Sarah wanted some pic-

tures of the kids and car in front of the house. Blues maker. One rundown two family flat in the middle of a block where most of the buildings had been demolished, leaving a stony, bricky, weedy desert, littered with old tires and bedsprings that appeared overnight, like magic mushrooms. The few surviving flats rose like dirty, scattered teeth in an old man's mouth.

But the high of the car, of success, kept on. When Lania, our ten year old daughter, came up with another cat, found only she knew where, we hardly argued.

Then our boy Arivial, our youngest, came back with a dog. I put my foot down, but not hard enough. A lot of angry words, and some tears, and the dog had a home.

It wasn't the arguments that convinced me. It was that dog's eyes.

That was the strangest dog I ever seen. One of them little hairy ones, Scottie I think, black as night, bony as death, wanting to be friendly but nervous about it, like some white dude you've been working with for years who's friendly on company time but don't know how you want he should act when you meet him outside.

It was his eyes. You ever see a dog

with blue eyes? Not blue like some blond white dude. Not like a kitten. Not like the sky, or turquoise, or anything light, but none of the darks either. A blue with depth. And, if you've ever looked at a dog's eyes, you know they're all color, kind of a brownish gold outside the pupil. Not these eyes. Outside the blue, that looked kind of deep and far away like the colored things inside the marbles kids call cateyes, they were clear as glass. My first thought was that he did have marbles for eyes. They were round and a little more forward on his head than most.

That whole dog was strange, but his eyes had a life of their own. Whenever I looked straight at them I felt like I was falling in, like I was watching a space show on Wanda's tv where Star Trek was coming to some planet. It scared me shitless.

I told Sarah maybe we better take him to the Humane Society, maybe something was wrong. Didn't want the kids to get bit. He didn't have no tags. She said we didn't have no money. Wouldn't till Friday, when the bakery check came, and that had to go for rent. Eighty bucks and we didn't even get hot water. Four rooms. It would have to wait. Maybe a long time. Next week was food stamps, then gas and electric, and cat and dog food, and clothes and shoes because school was starting and the younger ones were getting too big for last year's. . . . It's hard sometimes, but I never been in no trouble. Neither have my kids, which makes me proud. It's harder for them. They're growing up with people who steal and cheat all the time. Only thing any of us ever did was sometimes get Sarah a carton of Kools with the food stamps.

Maybe Arivial could find some soda



bottles, but that was always a hassle. The dude at the confectionary always thinks he stole them. We never buy no soda.

If you think I'm old fashioned, saving up to buy a car and not trying to break the system and raising my kids the same, I guess you're right. That's the way I was raised. Times was different then.

Arivial named the dog Ponce. He didn't seem so spooky when you didn't look at his eyes. He settled right in, most of the time acted just like any other dog. He barked at strangers. He bounced around with happy whines any time anybody came home, especially Arivial from school. He really was Arivial's dog. He growled at me when I growled at the boy. Only three days after we picked him up, he bit a kid when some boys tried to steal Arivial's new shoes. I thought there would be some trouble, but nobody ever came around. Those boys must've been afraid of the trouble they'd get if they squawked.

Guess you get used to anything if it's around you all the time, like having less than most, or a dog with blue eyes. It's just there and, unless you trip over it, you don't much notice. Unless you're young and you've got time to look around. That's one problem for the kids today. They've got the time. We didn't when I was young. Too busy trying to stay fed. I worked all my life. Started picking cotton with my folks in Arkansas when I was barely big enough to walk. Only way I know. You get to my age, you're pretty set in your ways.

You've got to figure on what you're hungry for, too. My parents would've thought our flat a mansion. A man's big goal, them days, was to bring his wife to the city. Now Bobby, my old-

est, was getting his foot on the next step up.

That Ponce was a smart pup. Wasn't a week before Arivial had him doing tricks. And there were some he figured for himself, like how to get out the screen door when it wasn't locked.

I came in from the bakery one night, to eat and get my watchman's uniform, and found Sarah all worried. Kids and cats and Ponce were all outside. The Lincoln was gone. I figured Bobby was off with his Mary Taylor again. I didn't see much of that car during the week. I hoped he wasn't wasting his book money.

Sarah said Arivial was talking to Ponce. I thought, so what? Everybody does. The cats too. But she said it was like they were talking serious, only Ponce just sat there real quiet and stared with those eyes. The boy had been telling her what Ponce had told him. She was afraid he wasn't playing pretend, that he really believed it. I said, well, I'll talk to him when I get a chance.

I was starting to be sorry that I let the kids have the pets. They cost too much even when we didn't get all the shots and tags. And I was sorry about the car, too, a little bit. Bobby wasn't home much anymore. He might get in trouble, might have a wreck, you know how you think.

It was a Sunday morning before church when I finally caught Arivial talking to Ponce the way that worried Sarah. You ever listen to a kid talking to a pet? When they don't know you're there? They get real serious, telling their problems. That dog, see, he don't tell no secrets, don't brush it off, don't make fun. He sits there and listens, and knows it's important, even if he don't understand. That's why kids need pets, I guess. A pet's

always got the time.

That's what Arivial was doing, only it was going like half a conversation. The boy would say something, ask a question, wait a while, then ask one or two questions about the answers he seemed to have gotten. I don't remember what his problem was. It wasn't something a grownup would think important. After I listened a while, I went and sat by Arivial. He was surprised but Ponce wasn't. Ponce always seemed to know where everybody was. I scratched his ears.

I told Arivial I understood about Ponce, but his mother didn't, that him talking to the dog all the time scared her. Especially when he told her what Ponce said back. He said Ponce *did* talk to him, with his eyes, and why should he lie? I always told him not to lie.

I said he didn't have to, just don't tell your mother, it makes her unhappy. He butted me some buts, then said okay. No more talking to Ponce where she'd hear, no more telling her what he said.

All the time Ponce sat there looking at me with those eyes, making me feel guiltier and guiltier. I got the feeling he was trying to tell me something, too, so I mostly looked away.

That took care of it for a week. Then it was Liana complaining. Don't know why she was upset. She was always talking to the cats. But I straightened that out, too. Then it was another of the kids, and another, till there was nobody left but me and Bobby, the two that was home the least. It got to be a puzzle. None of them bothered to explain, just to complain.

I finally got some time free, late in October, after Ponce had been with us two months. I took Arivial and Ponce to the park. You weren't sup-

posed to let dogs run loose there, but I took a chance Ponce would behave like always and stay by Arivial. He did.

I had kind of a suspicion that I asked about then, and Arivial admitted that he'd known Ponce a while before he'd asked if the dog could stay with us. I nodded, smiled. Arivial told me how smart Ponce was, staying out of sight those days. I said yes. I never argued with how smart that dog was. He was the smartest I ever seen.

I asked what they talked about. School stuff, he said. Ponce could explain things better than his teacher. He made it fun. And there wasn't no dumb stuff, like history. I asked what kind of stuff. Mostly arithmetic, he said.

I was beginning to see why the others had been bothered. Arivial wasn't playing pretend at all. I asked why didn't he show me. He'd always been interested in arithmetic. Did real good at it in school. I'd played games with him before. That's what I expected then.

But what he scratched in the dirt with a stick looked like chicken tracks. I thought about Bobby's college books. This didn't look the same. But I really couldn't tell. I only went to school now and then when I was a kid, and only got my grade school equivalency now. I want to do high school, but there just isn't time.

I asked what it was. He said some fancy words I didn't know he knew, then said that Ponce didn't know our notation so he'd had to learn Ponce's. Took me a minute to figure out what he meant. Then I said, well, why didn't he use some of the older kids' books to learn? I was just going along, figuring he'd seen Bobby's books and was making up something that looked

the same. He said he'd never thought about that.

There was peace around the house for a month. At least, nobody came to me complaining. Then Arivial brought home a note from his teacher.

It didn't say nothing but that Sarah should come in after school. She was so upset, so sure he was in trouble, that she wouldn't go. Arivial said he didn't know what it was about. Next day I took off early and went down.

His teacher and principal were both waiting. Liana had had that teacher last year. I didn't like her. She was the kind that thought you was against her if you taught your kid to brush his own teeth. But the principal was all right.

Wasn't no trouble, though. The principal did most of the talking. About where was Arivial learning arithmetic? The teacher just said she was awed. The principal said Arivial was doing high school work already, maybe higher. She thought he was a genius. Would I mind did they arrange for him to take some tests?

Then the teacher said that if he was a genius, he should get special training. I was surprised. I got in an unkind word when they asked did I know about Arivial's talent. Well, yes, I said, but I never said anything because of Liana last year. After that everybody told everybody how sorry they was, but by then I wasn't listening. I was thinking about Ponce.

I still didn't believe Arivial was really talking to him, but I worried that maybe he thought he was. Maybe the boy was a genius like they said; but what if he had to have Ponce to make it work? So he could believe in himself? I could fix it so he could study at home, but not so Ponce would live forever. Even if he was lucky and lasted maybe twelve years, there

would be Arivial without him when he was twenty-one.

Teacher and principal were saying was it all right did they let some people from the universities see Arivial. If he studied fancy arithmetic? Math, they said. He'd still have to study the regular stuff with the other kids. He wasn't no genius at everything. Sure, fine, I said, I'd be proud. But why were they so excited?

They said some things but I didn't listen. They weren't telling the truth. That was in their faces. They looked like old prospectors who had finally struck gold. Arivial was going to make them famous. I hedged then. Said everything was fine by me, sounded good, but I wanted to talk to Sarah and Arivial first.

I saw what could happen. Some good things could be done for Arivial, but it could be turned into a circus that would hurt him more. You hear about things like that in the news sometimes.

I just wanted to talk to Arivial. I knew what Sarah would say. She wouldn't want no part of it. She wanted her kids to be normal, as much like other kids as possible, to keep their heads down so to speak. She didn't realize that it was a new age, that some of the doors really were open a crack.

Arivial was waiting out front, scared to death. Sarah was waiting too, only upstairs, peeking out the blinds.

I told the boy what happened. At first he relaxed, then he got scared again when he realized people were going to make a fuss over him. He was always kind of quiet and private, and got embarrassed any time a stranger said something nice. He asked me did he have to take the tests and everything. I told him no, that was why I was talking to him, to

see if he wanted to. I said the school wanted to get him some special teachers, and like that, until I was sure he knew what it was all about. Then I told him to make up his mind himself. Maybe he should talk to Ponce about it.

I don't know why I said that. I felt silly afterwards. He said yeah, that's what he'd do.

Later, almost bedtime, he came to the warehouse where I was watchman and whispered that he'd take the tests and things so he could study. He said Ponce thought it was a good idea, that he should learn as much as he could as fast as he could so he'd know how to say the things he really had to say, just in case something happened. I didn't understand, but I said okay, I'd come to school on my lunch hour and tell his teacher.

It went all right. After he got over being shy, Arivial liked the attention. And he got lots of it. The university people seemed like good folks, mostly, and they didn't get any newspaper or tv people coming around. His teacher and principal were disappointed about that, I think. Sarah got used to the idea, started getting proud. Only Bobby was a problem, and he wasn't a big one.

The old car kept breaking down and I wouldn't let him spend his college money to fix it. His romance died off because of that. Made him grouchy for a while, so he took it out on Arivial for getting into his books. He threatened to spank him or go join the Army, depending on who he was talking to. He got over it. By then Arivial had finished his books. He'd passed Bobby by.

The more he learned, the faster he went. Sometimes, when I could get away early, I went to school with him and talked to the university people.

They used a lot of big words to do it, but what they said was that Arivial was starting to figure things out for himself. They could teach him something and he could almost, but not quite, tell them what came next.

What puzzled them was that he had his own system worked out and had to translate back and forth. They said he might be more than just a genius. The rate he was going, getting faster and faster, it wouldn't be long before they ran out of things to teach. They talked about sending away for teachers who knew more than they did. They were always all very excited.

Those nights I'd go home and stare at that blue-eyed dog and wonder. Somehow, he seemed the smaller miracle.

Summer came again. The university people wanted to take Arivial to California. He wanted to go, and to take Ponce.

Sarah said no. She wasn't letting no ten year old son of hers go nowhere for three months with no honkey strangers. When she talked hard and bitter like that, I didn't argue. I knew she wasn't going to change her mind.

So they brought the men from California to him. And a Dr. Conklin from back east, and even a man from Germany or someplace over there. I started getting real scared. They were spending more money than I made in a year, working two jobs, just to help my son learn math. I started thinking about things like Russian spies and the government looking Arivial up to protect him.

You can't keep secrets forever, especially when you got big-mouthed kids, a proud wife, and so many excited teachers. One day a radio man came to ask if he could interview Arivial on his station. Sarah got excited,

I got more scared, the kids got jealous, and we all decided it was up to Arivial. I thought he could handle it. Being around all those college people, he'd changed. He was like a little boy with a grown man inside. When he was serious. Other times he was his own age. He loved baseball. Sometimes he complained about missing out on that when he studied.

His all-time hero was Lou Brock and he wanted to grow up and play left field for the Cardinals. He kept saying he'd be like Einstein afterwards, when he got old. That bothered me some. I thought maybe they were pushing too hard. Maybe he should take some time off. But he didn't want to. Math was fun too.

I worried all the time, seems like.

Acting like that grown man, he did good on the radio. He talked about Ponce, but he was smart. He told his truth, but did it so everybody thought he was jiving them. He did the same thing later, on the tv. People were never sure how to take him.

I went downtown with him for the tv thing, wearing my church clothes. I was more nervous than him. He wanted to take Ponce, but I said better not.

Sarah worried too, but she was also proud. Now she really had something to brag to her friends about. Me too, except I didn't start till somebody asked. Sort of embarrassed, you know. Me so ignorant and him so smart. But everybody kept telling me how great it was, even Mr. Kasselbaum at the bakery, who hardly ever came out of the office except to chew somebody out.

But it got to be too much, especially after, with help from this physicist, Dr. Conklin, Arivial wrote this article about hologrammatic numbers. He didn't know how to spell right or

how to put the words down, but he knew the numbers. After that all kinds of people came to the house. We tried to be nice, but you couldn't get anything done. Just because my kid was smart didn't mean I should stop working, though Mr. Kasselbaum and the security company were good about me missing if I had to. And Sarah had the house and the kids had school, and Arivial was busier than anybody, trying to keep up with regular school, his special teachers, work on another article he wanted to write, Ponce, and all the people who wanted to talk to him.

It hurt some people's feelings and made some others mad, but we finally had to stop seeing anybody but family, friends, and the university people. Arivial kept telling me his new project was hard, that even Ponce had trouble explaining it because people still didn't have the concepts. Before they could really understand they would have to learn the hologrammatic notation.

Dr. Conklin tried to tell me about it. He said the new math would modify, prove, and expand some of Einstein's work. He was the translator, so to speak, the man who'd write it up so people could understand. He was having trouble, too, smart as he was. He said it was as much philosophy as physics and math, but when they got it straight it could be used to explain lots of things scientists had been having trouble with for years. I just kept nodding my head till he decided I was as smart as Arivial.

About that time Bobby found him a new girlfriend and had to have the car all the time. It was broke down more than it ran. Every time it died we had to wait and scrimp to get it fixed, plus saving up for licenses and insurance, that I never thought about when I

bought it. That old thing was more trouble than it was worth. I would've sold it except for Bobby.

This Dr. Conklin wasn't only interested in Arivial. Sometimes he'd start talking about Nobel Prizes and look greedy, but I guess that's just the way people are.

Bobby kept the car fixed and started running around. This time he was so involved that he didn't care about anything else. I found out he was getting into his school money for gas and things. He wouldn't listen when I tried to talk to him.

Arivial and Dr. Conklin kept getting more and more excited. They were getting close. Though he didn't believe Arivial was really learning from Ponce, he kept telling the boy to spend time with him. Told me he figured any way a man got his mind working was all right, even talking to dogs. Only the output counted. I agreed some and didn't agree. You could push it too far.

The way they talked, they had their paper down to the final match. I got the feeling mobs of people were waiting to grab it. More and more people came to the house, though we kept telling them to go away.

There was something about it on the radio, the tv, or in the newspapers every day. Everybody was on about the ten year old who was opening a whole new view of the universe. Part of the paper got pirated and printed and scientists started fighting like dogs around a bitch in heat. Some said it was another breakthrough to understanding as important as Newton's or Einstein's. Some others said it was the biggest fraud since organized politics. On the tv, right after one of these men had his say, they would show Arivial talking about Ponce.

I still think I took that dog more serious than anybody but Arivial. Sometimes I would just sit and stare at him for an hour. And sometimes he'd open one eye and sort of smile, as much as a dog can. I thought about trying to talk to him, just to convince myself he was only a dog, but I never got around to it. Maybe I was scared I'd be wrong. If I was, that meant I had to think about a whole lot of other things, like how could a dog talk, how come he was so smart, how come he had blue eyes, and so on.

Sometimes I think about that anyway. Maybe it's just because I'm too ignorant to know better.

The car broke down again. Water pump. When I came home from the bakery, there was Bobby fixing it. I got mad. Really mad. He'd been spending all his money and time on the car and his girlfriend. Sarah said he'd started cutting classes. I really gave it to him.

He took it for a while because I don't get on him that much and, anyway, he knew he was wrong. But when I started talking about his girl he blew up. We never came closer to fighting. He jerked the last bolt into place, slammed the hood, wiped his hands, jumped in, roared away. For about ten feet.

Ponce managed just one surprised yip.

My god, Bobby said, jumping out, my god. Pop, I didn't mean. . . . I'm sorry. . . .

I hadn't seen him cry since he was eleven. Didn't see him too good this time. It was hard to see through my own tears. I went to the dog. Ponce, I said, Ponce. . . . But there was nothing I could do. He was dead.

One by one the other kids turned up, and their friends, and Sarah and Wanda, and almost everybody in the

neighborhood. A lot of the kids cried. They'd all liked Ponce. Nobody knew what to do.

All the time I was looking at those eyes. After a while the blue started fading. For a moment they were clear as colorless marbles, then they went dark. I thought I saw a lot of little lights swirling around in there, then they faded too. Might have been the street lights. They were just coming on. Then they were just plain dog's eyes.

Arivial was with Dr. Conklin, but he'd be coming home soon. We just kept standing around till a cop came by and asked what was going on. I told him. He remembered me and Ponce from tv. Told us not to block the street and went on. So I finally picked up Ponce and took him upstairs.

Arivial took it better than I expected, but he was hurt. Bad. He mostly stayed to himself for a few days, not doing anything but going to school and sometimes talking to Dr.

Conklin. Conklin was upset too. Just another week, he kept saying, and they would've had it.

When Arivial got over it he went back to work. But he'd changed. He wasn't dumber, but he was a lot slower. It's been a year now and they're still trying to finish up. Arivial's showing the way, but without Ponce he can't get there except by inches.

The university people tried to convince him that he didn't need Ponce. It didn't work. Maybe it was all in his head, maybe it wasn't. I'm not sure. I don't think I ever will be.

A couple weeks after Ponce died Arivial said something that still makes me wonder. He said Ponce wasn't really dead, that he just went back. It was only a dog that Bobby killed. Ponce would come home if he really needed him.

And maybe that would be true even if the dog's talking was all in his imagination.

—GLEN COOK

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### Editorial (cont.)

mannerisms—and which I call “sci-fi”—goes on to ever-greater popular success.

We saw it coming; our only mistake was in assuming this would be limited to the world of the printed word

when there are a hundred people out there who don't like to read for every one of us who does.

“Sci-Fi” may be the death of us.

—TED WHITE

*If you can't change the environment, maybe you can change the people . . .*

# LAST ROCKET FROM NEWARK

## JACK C. HALDEMAN II

Illustrated by Joe Staton

THE SUN rose slowly over the gigantic oil tank, suffusing the smoggy air with a pallid glow. Smokestacks belched the last of the night shift's garbage into the air as the turnpike filled with bumper-to-bumper cars inching their way towards New York City. Calvin rolled over and shut off his alarm clock.

Wiping away the black dust that had settled on the clock's face overnight, he greeted the day with his usual cheerful optimism. The water pipes clanked and rattled at him; he grinned at the familiar sound. He flipped on the radio as he hopped out of bed.

Humming happily to himself, he shaved while listening to a bored newscaster announce that a smog alert was being posted for the 23rd consecutive day. Got a ways to go to beat the record of 205 days set back in '83. Oh well, that was for other people to worry about. He washed the lather from his face, noticing absently that the water was a rusty brown this morning.

Calvin walked over to the window and opened it briskly, letting in the morning smells and sounds. As his

room overlooked the turnpike, the traffic noises were the loudest but without difficulty he could hear obscure clanking sounds from the oil refinery. Certainly he caught the smells from the refinery, but he scarcely noticed them. He had been smelling it for all his 26 years, it was a part of the normal background of his life.

Energetically, he touched his toes and did pushups, ending with deep knee bends in front of the open window. It was his day off and he couldn't wait to get started. He drank a quick cup of coffee and ate some toast. When he finished, he changed into a gray sweatsuit and trotted down the 25 flights of stairs to street level.

Jogging was one of his great delights. He jogged every chance he got. Although he owned a car, he seldom used it except to go into the city. Not Newark, but New York City—The Big Apple, home of bright lights, tinsel, muggers and gang warfare. He loved it. It made him feel alive.

But he loved his morning jaunts more. Even on weekdays he jogged to the factory. On his day off his favorite pastime was to jog around the

perimeter of Newark Airport. Such a variety of scenery, such excitement; a real monument to man's greatness.

The side of the airport nearest him bordered on the New Jersey Turnpike. It was such a thrill to jog alongside 16 lanes of traffic. As usual there was a backup of cars and everyone was just inching along, spewing great clouds of exhaust fumes which rose a few feet and hung there. He waved at the grim, determined faces; some he recognized from previous jogs. Many were honking their horns, shouting and waving their fists at the other drivers. Calvin smiled. It made him feel a part of the great brotherhood of man.

On his left was one of the runways of the airport. He loved to watch the great planes take off and land, their swollen bellies full of passengers and cargo. All the noise and excitement made his heart pound. On a rare clear day he could almost make out the control tower sitting in the middle of the airport. He could imagine the harried air controllers as they tried, often in vain, to co-ordinate the many planes. He grinned. A job for everyone and for everyone a job.

What really set his heart aflutter were the rare occasions when he got to see one of the new Jumbo Giant Super Jets take off. So huge and awkward on the ground, it was inconceivable that they could ever fly. But as they taxied down the runway and all 18 jets fired at once; well, that would make *anyone* believe in man's higher purpose.

When they lifted into the air a lump would come to Calvin's throat. Wobbling, ungainly, spilling kerosene from each massive jet engine, the plane would create a dark, smeary cloud that trailed behind it. Calvin would watch the cloud dissipate as



he jogged, its dark edges blurring with the general grayness of the sky. Soon there would be no trace of its passing except for a light drizzle of kerosene droplets.

At the end of the runway, Calvin would turn left and continue along the short end of the field. On his right would be the oil refineries. He loved the massive tanks. They were, well, so *human*. The pipes and catwalks that connected the tanks were so complex that he was sure a computer was necessary to sort them out. They were all strung with lights and at night looked like a large city. And a city it was, too, but a city in which no one lived. A city whose occupants were fluids, moving in orderly fashion from one tank to another. Just like the real world ought to be.

While Calvin was jogging in this section he would have to dodge the big thirsty tank trucks as they entered the gates. He loved to watch them pull up to the massive tanks and fill themselves with the unseen fluid. It amazed him that it was all accomplished with so few humans around, almost everything was done by machine. It was almost as if all the humans could disappear and it would keep on going. Somehow this thought comforted Calvin and he would continue jogging until he reached the end of the short side of the airport where he would again turn left and begin the nature portion of his jog.

It was here that Calvin felt particularly close to the soil. On his left was the back of the airport; a series of featureless brick buildings that, while interesting at times, left his mind free to contemplate the wonders on his right.

For on his right lay the marshes. Stretching out to the auto junkyard in the distance, they brought out the

dormant naturalist in Calvin. The oil-slicked water and dull brown plants were his only contact with nature; except, of course, for the plastic geranium kept in his windowsill. He loved the marsh with all its natural wonders. He watered his geranium every day.

Once he had stopped jogging and explored the edge of the marsh. It was there that he found evidence of the harmony that exists between man and his environment. It wasn't ten feet from a pile of rusty beer cans that he found the dead frog. And the frog was right next to some sort of an oil soaked bird! What beauty there was in the inter-relationships of man and nature.

As Calvin jogged along the road that morning he had an uneasy feeling that something was wrong. He looked over his shoulder and saw a nondescript black car about 25 feet behind him. It was driving at the same slow speed that he was jogging. It made him suspicious. He stopped and the car stopped. He started up again, jogged about ten paces and stopped suddenly, turning abruptly. The car started and stopped clumsily, its occupants trying desperately to look nonchalant. All three people in the car, including the driver, whipped up newspapers and pretended they were reading them. It didn't fool Calvin for a second. The papers were several days old and one of them was holding his upside down. Calvin began to believe he was being followed.

He walked over to the car.

"Can I help you?" he asked, jogging in place.

"U.S. Government," said one, producing a badge.

"National Space Force," said the driver, folding up the newspaper.

"Far out," said Calvin, doing deep

knee bends, his arms extended in front of him. He resisted the impulse to salute.

"We've been watching you."

"I can tell."

"Not just today. For a long time."

Calvin stopped doing deep knee bends. He started jogging in place again.

The fat one in the back leaned out the window.

"Son," he said, "your country needs you."

Calvin stopped jogging.

"We're going to make you an astronaut."

Calvin felt faint. An astronaut! And he hadn't even been sure they were still sending up rockets.

"Yes sir," he said. This time he did salute.

"Get in," said the fat one, opening the back door. They sped away from the marshes onto the turnpike and inched their way into New York City.

Eventually, deep in the muggy city, they pulled into a parking lot next to a large chrome and glass building. As Calvin automatically started towards the front door, one of the men grabbed his arm and steered him towards a featureless converted brownstone next door.

"Budget cuts," was the mumbled apology.

Inside the building a lot of busy people stood at each other's desks, sharpened pencils and held up the water cooler.

The fat man took Calvin to the front of the room.

"I want you all to meet . . ." he gestured to Calvin with his arm, "the first American to walk on Jupiter!"

Everyone cheered.

"What am I supposed to do?" asked Calvin.

"Just wave. Take a bow if you

want."

Calvin waved and there was even more applause. The clamor didn't stop until Calvin was led into a small room.

"Jupiter?" asked Calvin.

"Yes. The big daddy of them all. Perhaps man's last frontier. And think of it—you'll be the first man there."

"Why me? I'm not an astronaut."

"You fit all the qualifications. You're between the ages of 23 and 34, in good physical shape, an American citizen from Newark, an IQ over 85. I could go on, but you get the idea. You're our boy."

"But I don't even drive my car too well. How am I going to handle all that rocket ship and module business?"

"No problem at all. We gave up training astronauts a long time ago. Too expensive. It's much easier to make everything automatic."

"I'm as patriotic as the next guy, but isn't this kind of dangerous?"

"It's as safe as walking down the street."

Calvin pondered this a minute and thought about walking down a New York street. He figured the trip to Jupiter would be safer.

"What'll I have to do?"

"Easy as pie. After you land just walk around and pick up rocks or whatever is lying around on the ground, take some pictures and get back inside. Everything is automatic; return blast off and everything."

"It sounds okay. When is the mission scheduled?"

"Tomorrow. You'll take an eight a.m. flight down to the Cape and then take the shuttle up to Space Station One. You'll leave for Jupiter from there."

Calvin was excused from the meeting and took a cab back home, paying

for it out of his own pocket. He sat at his window and watched the sunset turn the oil refineries burnt orange. He loved sunsets.

The next morning he found, to his relief, that he didn't have to buy his own ticket for the flight to the Cape. He did, however, have to fly in the sub-coach section. The 300 seat compartment was so filled that his breakfast didn't arrive until after they arrived in Florida. He ate it while waiting for his turn to deplane.

He was met by a tall, serious man from the Space Force. Together they rode the tour bus out to the Cape.

As the bus swung by the launch pad the man said something to the driver and they both got off.

"This is it," said the man from the Space Force, walking towards the van that would take them out to the shuttle.

"I can understand about the training expenses, but won't I be briefed or anything?"

"The trip to Jupiter will take several months. Plenty of time to learn to walk around and pick up rocks, wouldn't you say? Also, there's a manual inside the probe. It should tell you everything you need to know. If you have any questions, there's always the radio. Just give mission control a call anytime during business hours."

The van pulled up next to the shuttle and Calvin climbed aboard along with the tourists that were the shuttle's normal passengers.

Calvin was introduced as the man who was going to Jupiter and everybody came over to shake his hand and ask for his autograph. Lots of

people bought him drinks and by the time he arrived at the Space Station he was entertaining them all with off-color songs he had learned in the bars of Newark.

At the station, however, things were cold and efficient. He was plucked from the shuttle and popped into the probe. Before he had time for a cup of coffee he was on his way.

The probe was small, but well equipped. Before he passed the orbit of Mars he had learned how to make a passable wine from the powdered fruit drink they provided him.

Soon Jupiter filled the view-port. He gathered up his small instant-loading camera and a few plastic bags for the rocks and waited for the landing.

As promised, the landing was smooth and automatic. The gravity bothered him a little bit, but jogging in Newark had honed his body to a razor's edge.

One thing, however, did bother him.

"Hey mission control," he shouted into his radio. "Where's my space suit?"

He heard the mechanical rumbling of the door's opening mechanism.

"We couldn't afford one," came the delayed answer.

"What?"

"You're from Newark. We figured you could breathe the atmosphere."

The door swung open and poisonous gasses filled the cabin. He took a deep breath. Just like home, he grinned, wondering if there was a turnpike nearby.

—JACK C. HALDEMAN II

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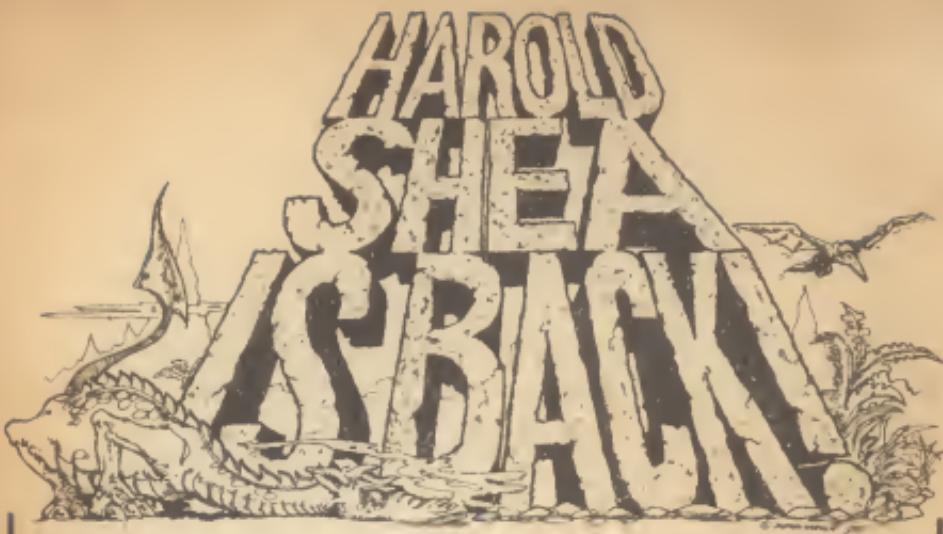
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